

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

**Embracing Spiritual Growth: Laying the Groundwork to Address Spiritual Growth
Anxiety Through a Covenant Union with Christ.**

A Thesis Project Report Submitted to
the Faculty of the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

by

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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This action research project addresses spiritual growth anxiety within BrandofMan Ministries by helping members better understand their covenant union with Christ. The goal was to use this understanding to promote grace-based spiritual growth through positional righteousness. The project involved analyzing existing literature and integrating theological and theoretical concepts to develop a teaching method that effectively addresses anxiety linked to spiritual development. The project measured the participants' prior knowledge and application of spiritual growth through a covenant union with Christ and how a systematic curriculum on the topic could be used to enhance their knowledge, improve application, and reduce anxiety. Sixteen volunteers were provided with identical questions and participated in three qualitative and quantitative data collection methods: pre- and post-intervention interviews, questionnaires, and surveys. The volunteers then engaged in a ten-week curriculum with eight teaching sessions covering themes including biblical anxiety, biblical foundations of spiritual growth, covenant theology, union in Christ, the 'God-in-You' principle of sanctification, monergism, law and gospel, and sovereign rest. At the end of the curriculum, the participants were provided with the same interviews, questionnaires, and surveys to measure their growth in knowledge and application of the topic. The collected data was analyzed to determine if the curriculum addressed spiritual growth anxiety through a believer's covenant union with Christ. The research found that the curriculum was effective, supported by significant growth in qualitative data and objective results.

Keywords: spiritual growth, anxiety, sanctification, covenant, union, and in Christ

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Abbreviations

DMIN	<i>Doctor of Ministry</i>
ESG	<i>Embracing Spiritual Growth</i>
LCC	<i>Lookout Community Church</i>
FBC	<i>Faith Baptist Church</i>

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The Christian community extensively debates biblical sanctification and its implication for implementation. Culture's influence and a lack of sound biblical guidance can lead to anxiety for many Christians concerning their spiritual growth. Diverse interpretations of the biblical doctrine of sanctification may result in divergent perspectives and concerns about behavior that does not conform to a believer's covenant union with Christ.

This DMIN action research project addressed the challenges of spiritual growth anxiety within the Christian community through a believer's covenant union with Christ. The teaching ministry at BrandofMan Ministries in Adin, CA, implemented an innovative curriculum emphasizing the covenantal union between believers and Christ. The curriculum fostered a deeper understanding of sanctification. It alleviated spiritual growth anxiety by promoting new ways of thinking among the faithful and provided a deep understanding of the believer's covenant union with Christ.

The educational program 'Embracing Spiritual Growth' was developed with utmost diligence and precision, utilizing a systematic approach to gather a comprehensive collection of recent and pertinent source materials. Embracing Spiritual Growth was devised with a complete pedagogical method, ensuring that each aspect of the program was thoroughly covered. The established rigorous evaluation system further validates the credibility of the program. The program was designed to provide a comprehensive and structured approach to spiritual growth and was developed to meet the needs of individuals seeking to enrich their spiritual lives. The

program was anchored on a biblical and doctrinal gap within the local ministry, a deficiency in understanding and applying a believer's covenantal union with Christ in sanctification.

Embracing Spiritual Growth addressed this gap, empowering believers to realize their covenant union with Christ, apply His finished work to sanctification, and rest in Him.

Ministry Context

Embracing Spiritual Growth was centered around BrandofMan Ministries, an independent Reformed Baptist ministry in Adin, California. It began in 2016 with the primary objective of offering communal biblical studies to members of various local churches. This has expanded to include a weekly Bible study podcast. The researcher, who holds an MA in Christian Ministry from Liberty University's J. W. Rawlings School of Divinity, serves as the senior pastor of this ministry, as well as an administrator and instructor, aided by a team of technical and clerical staff. The ministry boasts an abundance of resources necessary to competently promote, manage, and bring to fruition the desired project. These resources include adequate time and finance, a capable workforce, available sites, strong community interest, and an esteemed reputation. While the ministry's theological model is Reformed Baptist, BrandofMan Ministries hosts a wide range of Christian denominations, such as Conservative Baptist, Progressive Baptist, Pentecostal, and Evangelical.

Demographics

According to *Datausa*, the median age in Adin, CA, is 67.2, the average household income is 37,600, and the median property value is \$139,000.¹ Additional demographic data

¹ Datausa, "Adin, CA," *Datausa.io*, 2021, <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/adin-ca/> (accessed October 23, 2023).

shows that the population diversity of the region is distributed among different racial and ethnic groups. Of these, 82.5 percent of the population is identified as white, while 16.4 percent is of American Indian origin.² The remaining percentage of the population comprises individuals from various Asian, Hispanic, and African-American communities. According to the data provided by BrandofMan Ministries, the ministry began with five members in 2016 and has since grown to thirty-five individuals from this community demographic, aged between thirty-two and seventy-two years old. Most members, 97 percent to be precise, are of white (non-Hispanic) ethnicity, with approximately 85 percent female. It is worth noting that all thirty-five members have completed their high school education, while fifteen have pursued some college education, twelve hold a four-year degree, and two have post-graduate degrees.

Local Culture Setting

The setting of Adin is a rural agricultural and forestry town in Modoc County, located in the northeast region of California. It was founded in 1869 and is forty-nine miles southwest of Alturas and ninety-one miles from the southern border of Oregon.³ The town has an elevation of 4,203 feet and a population of 205.⁴ Adin is a central community in the Big Valley area comprising four towns: Bieber, Nubieber, Lookout, and Adin, with a total population of 805. This region is known for its natural beauty and rich agricultural heritage. Adin, in particular, is a vibrant town rich in farmland and livestock that serves as a hub for community activities. The entire Big Valley area boasts several churches and a close-knit Christian community that is proud of its history and culture.

² Datausa, "Adin, CA."

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

BrandofMan Ministries is a unique organization in Adin, as its members attend regular Sunday services at local churches throughout the Big Valley area while also participating in the teaching ministry of BrandofMan Ministries. In consultation with the pastor and elders of the local churches attended by members of BrandofMan Ministries, the researcher compiled the following demographic and contextual information. Grace Bible Church, located in Bieber, CA, was founded in 1968. It has an average membership of seventy-five and is a Pentecostal church. The Lookout Community Church was founded in Lookout, CA, in 1916. It has an average membership of twenty and is a non-denominational evangelical church. The Adin Community Bible Church was founded in Adin, CA, in 1910. It has an average of fifty-five members and is a progressive Baptist church. The Faith Bible Church, located in Alturas, CA, was founded in 1961. It has an average membership of 120 and is a Conservative Baptist church. These churches are within a seventy-five-mile radius and have active members who regularly participate in activities with BrandofMan Ministries.

Local Ecclesiological Influence

BrandofMan Ministries comprises individuals from various local churches with distinctive theological viewpoints. Therefore, each member's diverse presuppositions frequently challenge their sanctification and spiritual growth teachings. This is a common phenomenon among all churches in the area, where several theological, social, and cultural factors come into play. These presuppositions can stem from attending other churches, early life experiences, social media, family and friends, and other sources. Moreover, members derived theological inspiration from different periods and instances in their lives directly associated with community activities, which further contributed to the diversity of perspectives within the group. As a result, members' distinct views affected their principles of biblical interpretation and significantly

impacted the understanding and application of their union with Christ in spiritual growth.

Therefore, in this ministry context, Embracing Spiritual Growth interacted with participants who interpreted Scripture from various theological backgrounds. At BrandofMan Ministries, the depth of engagement in these practices significantly shaped and enhanced one's spiritual growth. Consequently, members of this ministry have a diverse set of practices and theological styles that they deeply value and identify with as devoted followers of Christ.

Researcher Connection to Participants

The researcher was a resolute community member for nearly three decades. Over the years, he earned the unwavering trust and respect of the locals through his commitment to their well-being. From serving as a first responder in law enforcement to coaching high school football and even as a local pastor for the past eight years, he dedicated himself to impacting the lives of those around him positively. In addition, the researcher raised two children in the area and actively participated in a wide range of community events, including fundraisers, holiday celebrations, agricultural fairs, and church activities.

The researcher regularly conducted a teaching ministry once per week on Thursday evenings from 6 to 7 p.m. In addition, he provided a weekly educational podcast at BrandofMan.org, covering basic Christian principles and expository teaching of biblical documents. Numerous individuals from BrandofMan Ministries collaborated with the researcher in various aspects of pastoral ministry. As a result, the researcher established strong trust with these individuals, leading to relationships extending beyond the ministry environment through outdoor and social activities. Ministry members knew the researcher's dedication to advancing their theological education and willingly participated in the Embracing Spiritual Growth material.

Ministry Culture

Since 2016, BrandofMan Ministries consistently displayed exceptional dedication to increasing biblical knowledge and discernment among its members. Their teachings aligned with the guidelines provided by the apostle Paul in his first Epistle to Timothy, accurately conveying the authority of God's Word and its sufficiency in all spiritual and moral matters (1 Tim 3:16). The senior pastor deployed an expository approach to impart Christian principles. This was done through a detailed analysis of entire books of the Bible to ensure a comprehensive and impactful teaching style. This approach was a consistent and central feature within the ministry context. A high standard of teaching was embedded in the ministry's contextual development and application foundation through the investigative approach of exegesis instead of eisegesis. The approach to teaching was the discernment of biblical text achieved through a profound understanding of the theological beliefs and the principles of reasoning that undergird them (1 Pet 3:15).

BrandofMan Ministries was guided by the principle of renewing the mind through the Holy Spirit, achieved through a covenant relationship with Jesus Christ, the 1689 London Baptist confession of faith, and a historical, contextual, and covenantal hermeneutic. The ministry's vision was to promote and facilitate this renewal process, leading individuals to embrace a new way of thinking in accordance with Ephesians 4:23–24, leaving behind old secular ways of thinking. This process enabled individuals to understand and realize their covenant union with Christ while promoting spiritual growth through forming and applying new behavior. The ministry's mission was to inspire and guide individuals, helping them on their spiritual journey toward a more fulfilling and purposeful life.

BrandofMan Ministries membership was rooted in the fundamental teachings of the apostle Paul in Romans 7, highlighting the covenantal connection between the believer and

Christ and the saint/sinner blueprint. By engaging in the kingdom of God, members aligned themselves with the biblical concept of “already but not yet,” meaning that while the kingdom may not reach its full potential until the future, they actively engage with it in the present. At BrandofMan Ministries, individuals with varying theological backgrounds came together to delve into the exegetical study of God’s Word. With a humble and charitable attitude towards differences of thought, members contributed their unique perspectives to the discussion. Scripture study was approached with utmost care and attention to detail through rigorous scholarship, critical thinking, and analytical skills. While BrandofMan has a clear vision and mission, its members are deeply connected to the practices of their churches. Nevertheless, a few voiced concerns about the lack of emphasis on biblical fundamentals, particularly sanctification, in their respective congregations. This gap in teaching left members vulnerable to confusing God’s sovereignty with human effort in their spiritual growth, which in turn was causing them to lose touch with their covenantal relationship with Christ.

Problem Presented

Several devout Christians who were part of BrandofMan Ministries shared their apprehensions with the researcher regarding the sluggish pace or even lack of progress in their spiritual journey. They were concerned that their lack of clarity about the principles and practices of spiritual development was causing them discomfort and unnecessary self-analysis, potentially impeding their ability to connect with Christ. Notably, this was not an isolated issue within their community, as a recent 2022 survey conducted by researchers at Barna.com revealed that 74 percent of U.S. adults surveyed expressed a desire for spiritual advancement.⁵ Specifically, the

⁵ David Kinnaman, “Rising Spiritual Openness in America,” *Barna.com*, January 19, 2023, <https://www.barna.com/research/rising-spiritual-openness/> (accessed September 29, 2023).

data suggests that nearly 75 percent of the adult population within the country felt that their current spiritual growth was not meeting their desired expectations.⁶

A study published in the *Journal of Religion and Health* researched spiritual anxiety among adult Christians. The study hypothesized that religious comfort is associated with different types of religious struggles, including fear/guilt, negative emotions toward God, and negative social interactions related to religion.⁷ The study revealed that individuals who have a secure connection with God are prone to report higher life satisfaction and lower anxiety levels.⁸ Additionally, those who have anxiously or avoidantly attached to God tend to exhibit lower levels of life satisfaction.⁹

Consequently, as Barna's research shows, Christianity witnessed a decline in its reputation and influence on cultural development, leading to a reduction of Sunday worship services or their complete removal.¹⁰ Additionally, recent research conducted by Barna has identified a notable change in societal attitudes towards the Christian faith.¹¹ This shift has decreased the prominence of Sunday worship services, Bible studies, discipleship, and other church activities.¹² These activities have traditionally been considered essential for spiritual growth and have significantly influenced sanctification within the Christian community.¹³ The

⁶ Kinnaman, "Rising Spiritual Openness in America."

⁷ Malgorzata Szcześniak, and Celina Timoszyk-Tomczak, "Religious Struggle and Life Satisfaction among Adult Christians: Self-esteem as a Mediator." *Journal of Religion and Health* 59, no. 6 (2020), 2837–28, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7677265/>.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Kinnaman, "Rising Spiritual Openness in America."

¹¹ David Kinnaman, "Signs of Decline & Hope Among Key Metrics of Faith," *Barna.com*, Mar 4, 2020, <https://www.barna.com/research/changing-state-of-the-church/>.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Szcześniak and Timoszyk-Tomczak, "Religious Struggle and Life Satisfaction," 2837–38.

research conducted by Barna centered around the concept of the “practicing Christian,” which was measured through a combination of three variables: self-identification as a Christian, a strong prioritization of faith, and regular church attendance.¹⁴ The latter two variables underscore a general inclination toward spiritual growth.¹⁵ Barna’s research indicates that all three have declined due to the rise of digital lifestyles, including social media, economic shifts, and changing social norms among several age groups.¹⁶ This cultural shift represents a generational transformation that carries noteworthy consequences for personal and communal spiritual development.¹⁷ As per the findings of Pew Research, a notable proportion of the U.S. adult populace, amounting to 20 percent, identify as having “no particular religion.”¹⁸ The current scenario illustrates a substantial decline in religious affiliation among adults compared to a decade ago when only 12 percent claimed such affiliation.¹⁹ In 2019, a research study focused on the central question of “What helps Christians grow?” The study aimed to evaluate the decline in discipleship through the concept of sanctification. Christians were asked about their perceived strengths, calling, and preferred ways to enhance their spiritual development to gain insight into their spiritual growth.²⁰ Conducting a thorough investigation into the notable decline of traditional avenues and methods of spiritual progression is of utmost importance. The impact of

¹⁴ Kinnaman, “Signs of Decline.”

¹⁵ Szcześniak, “Religious Struggle and Life,” 2837–38.

¹⁶ Kinnaman, “Signs of Decline.”

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Gregory A. Smith, “About Three-in-Ten U.S. Adults Are Now Religiously Unaffiliated” Pewresearch.org, December 14, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated/>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Leslie J. Francis, Simon Foster, David W. Lankshear, and Ian Jones, “What Helps Christians Grow? An Exploratory Study Distinguishing among Four Distinctive Pathways,” *Pastoral Psychology* 68, no. 4 (2019), 383–86, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-019-00866-5>.

this decline in the spiritual growth of Christians is significant. Decreased church attendance, reduced participation in Bible studies, fewer instances of individual confessions of faith, and decreased involvement in church activities all contribute to hindrances in spiritual advancement. Thus, it is imperative to comprehend the causes behind this decline and implement appropriate measures to facilitate improvement.²¹

BrandofMan Ministries faced numerous challenges in addressing spiritual growth for assurance, application, and understanding. Meeting members at their current level of understanding was imperative to research and address the challenges related to the biblical doctrine of sanctification effectively. However, recent data highlighted the need for significant work in this area, underscoring the importance of further research and analysis to understand these challenges and develop practical solutions.

Acknowledging external factors that significantly affected one's spiritual journey was essential. Numerous individuals were disheartened after participating in activities they believed would enhance their spiritual development and biblical comprehension, only to encounter doubt and disappointment. A few of the most notable examples included an over-emphasis on self-analysis, which led to the creation of idols from spiritual disciplines. Step programs that aimed to enhance spiritual growth often contributed to these problems. Recognizing that self-analysis became counterproductive when taken to an extreme was crucial. Instead of leading to growth and self-improvement, it focused on one's flaws and shortcomings. Furthermore, it was essential to remember that spiritual disciplines are meant to be tools for growth and not ends in themselves.²² When ideas or methods are idolized, it can lead to a skewed perception of

²¹ Francis, Foster, Lankshear, and Jones, "What Helps Christians Grow?," 385.

²² Patrick Morley, *A Man's Guide to the Spiritual Disciplines: 12 Habits to Strengthen Your Walk with Christ* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2023), 14, ProQuest Ebook Central.

spirituality and a misdirected emphasis on oneself. There was also a fixation on prioritizing accomplishments, triumphs, and external displays of faith, which led to adverse effects. Consequently, these activities resulted in a superficial application of spiritual growth and generated unrealistic standards that were challenging to maintain. This outcome undermined their confidence in their spiritual growth, which was contrary to what they anticipated. Therefore, it was crucial to recognize the impact of external factors and their potential to influence one's spiritual journey. The problem was that adult members of BrandofMan Ministries had a deficiency in understanding and applying their covenantal union with Christ in sanctification.

Purpose Statement

This DMIN action research project developed and utilized a curriculum emphasizing an adult's union with Christ for managing sanctification anxiety. Most adult members of BrandofMan Ministries who struggle with spiritual growth had either secular beliefs about sanctification or a biblical understanding of sanctification that did not acknowledge the covenantal relationship between God's sovereignty and human effort. They often viewed sanctification as solely the work of God, exclusively the work of humans, or a cooperative effort between God and humans.

Given the significance of the ministry's role in educating and facilitating spiritual development and growth, it was imperative that these beliefs were tackled with utmost care and attention. To this end, it was essential that the ministry adopt a proactive and comprehensive approach that prioritized its members' spiritual needs and sought to provide them with the necessary tools and resources to achieve their spiritual objectives. This required a deep understanding of the underlying issues and challenges, as well as a commitment to ongoing

education and research to ensure that the ministry remained focused on the spiritual development and growth of its members through the transforming power of Christ. The curriculum, *Embracing Spiritual Growth*, focused on understanding the intricate relationship between God and humanity through a believer's covenantal union with Christ as a crucial first step toward addressing concerns about a lack of spiritual growth. However, the goal of this program was not merely to provide knowledge for theoretical yield but for practical consideration.²³

Embracing Spiritual Growth delved deep into God's sovereignty expressed through Christ and work for the faithful to realize their connection with Him. The concept of transformation of the mind and human effort, as mentioned in Romans 12:2, was of great significance in the program. Individuals who sought to enhance their spiritual growth in sanctification benefited from adopting a clarified and robust theological framework. This approach fostered a more informed and effective effort toward Christian development, which ultimately led to a more fulfilled and enriched spiritual life.²⁴ The achievement of significant changes in the Christian life was facilitated by adopting a biblical worldview that placed a premium on the value of the believer's union with Christ. *Embracing Spiritual Growth* focuses on the solid relationship between believers and Christ, represented through an eternal covenant. This bond is unbreakable and transforms believers through a sovereign act of God, guiding them to work for His glory without ceasing.

²³ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 22, ProQuest Ebook Central.

²⁴ Don J. Payne, *Already Sanctified: A Theology of the Christian Life in Light of God's Completed Work* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), 11, ProQuest Ebook Central.

Basic Assumptions

Due to the expansive nature of the study and the constraints of time, Embracing Spiritual Growth was founded upon certain fundamental assumptions that guided the research methodology. These underlying presuppositions served as the framework for the curriculum design and were considered valid before conducting any analysis or drawing any conclusions. In the ensuing section, the researcher explored these assumptions in greater detail.

Prior analysis

One of the foremost assumptions for this research project was that all participants were eager to deepen their comprehension and practical application of their covenant with Christ, particularly in relation to sanctification. A believer's spiritual progress hinged on the tenet of sanctification, which is intrinsically tied to their union with Christ (1 Cor 1:30); grasping and enacting the covenantal bond with Christ was pivotal for one's spiritual advancement.

The researcher posited a second assumption: The present misunderstanding and practical application of the participant's covenantal union with Christ in sanctification resulted from inadequate biblical instruction and presentation. Participants' concerns regarding a lack of biblical teaching on spiritual growth reinforced this assumption.

Considering a third assumption, the researcher believed that a curriculum rooted in reformed systematic theology offered the most productive approach for instructing on the covenant union with Christ in sanctification. This pedagogical approach underscored the importance of comprehending the Bible entirely rather than fixating on isolated verses or sections.

According to the researcher's findings, delivering the curriculum in a small group setting instead of a lecture-style format yielded optimal results. This approach fostered a heightened

engagement with the material, encouraged intellectual growth, inspired enthusiasm, and promoted collaborative learning for more effective practical application.

Outcome Analysis

The researcher's first assumption was that every participant would complete the entire course curriculum. This assumption was based on the methodology, which required full participation to achieve the program's objective of spiritual growth. Embracing Spiritual Growth aimed to achieve this objective through increased knowledge and the development of new behavior in covenant union with Christ.

According to the second assumption, the program generated a greater interest and engagement within the church community. Its success was expected to lie in its ability to motivate participants to actively promote a deeper comprehension of their covenant union with Christ, particularly within sanctification.

A third premise assumed that when participants understood the principles of sanctification, they were likely to explore other interconnected aspects of their faith. For instance, they may develop an interest in learning about Paul's order of salvation in Romans 8:28–30, where a biblical perspective of sanctification held great significance.

The fourth assumption of the outcome analysis was predicated on the belief that the proposed curriculum would provide participants with a clear understanding of the doctrine of sanctification, thereby enabling them to apply this doctrine more effectively in their daily lives. By doing so, the curriculum's content would help participants achieve a greater degree of spiritual fulfillment and growth.

Finally, this researcher assumed a measurable outcome because comprehending one's beliefs and underlying rationale could lead to progress. Additionally, acknowledging the

imperfections in one's theological system was crucial. Frequently, individuals did not realize how little they knew about a subject until they began to learn about it. Therefore, acknowledging the potential flaws in one's perspective requires a combination of confidence and humility. While it was challenging, this self-awareness was integral to minimizing anxiety during spiritual development.

Definitions

The primary objective of Embracing Spiritual Growth was to conduct extensive research, design, and execute a Reformed-systematic curriculum that dealt explicitly with the covenantal connection between believers and Christ in sanctification. The BrandofMan Ministries community utilized this curriculum, encompassing key terminologies related to teaching the covenantal bond between believers and Christ and the doctrine of salvation. These terminologies were integrated throughout the entire program's development.

Antinomianism. This is an over-spiritualized perspective of Christianity that can lead believers to deny responsibility for their sins and their consequences.²⁵ Believers who dogmatize antinomianism typically take the position that Christians are above every law.²⁶ Antinomians disavow the ongoing relevance of specific aspects or the entirety of moral law.²⁷ Historically, antinomianism arose as a reaction to Arminianism, but its legitimacy among English reformers waned due to its propagation of principles that deviated from accepted orthodoxy.²⁸

²⁵ Paul Hessert, *Introduction to Christianity* (Milton Park, England: Taylor & Francis Group, 2023), 417, ProQuest Ebook Central.

²⁶ Miles Hopgood, *How Luther Regards Moses: The Lectures on Deuteronomy* (Gottingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2023), 141, ProQuest Ebook Central.

²⁷ Whitney G. Gamble, *Christ and the Law* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), 14, ProQuest Ebook Central.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

Communion with Christ. This term represents the outcome of a profound and intimate bond between a believer and Christ, which allows for extensive opportunities for active participation, personal connection, and joyful experiences.²⁹

Covenant theology. This manner of exposition emerged from the Reformation of the 16th century as a distinct theological discipline and has remained a staple of the reformist hermeneutic, mainly through the progression of covenants.³⁰ However, covenant theology has much deeper roots, extending back to the 2nd and 3rd centuries, as evidenced in the writings of Jerome, Irenaeus, Clement, and Eusebius.³¹ This tradition views God's dealings with mankind under the framework of three overarching theological covenants: redemption, works, and grace.³²

Definitive sanctification. Definitive sanctification is based on the believer being called by the Father to be in union with His Son, as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1:9.³³ This contributes to the change known as sanctification and ensures that the change is decisive, effectual, and eternal.³⁴ God's people are chosen, adopted, justified, made holy, kept, and glorified in Him, making their existence in Him definitive.³⁵

²⁹ Joel Beeke, and Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology, Volume 3: Spirit and Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 216, ProQuest Ebook Central.

³⁰ Christian A. Eberhart and Wolfgang Kraus, eds., *Covenant - Concepts of Berit, Diatheke, and Testamentum: Proceedings of the Conference at the Lanier Theological Library in Houston, Texas, November 2019* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2023), 13, ProQuest Ebook Central.

³¹ J. V. Fesko, *The Covenant of Works: The Origins, Development, and Reception of the Doctrine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2020), 13, ProQuest Ebook Central.

³² Eberhart and Kraus, *Covenant - Concepts of Berit*, 13.

³³ Carl F. H. Henry, ed., *Basics of the Faith: An Evangelical Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 175, ProQuest Ebook Central.

³⁴ Christopher W. Morgan, and Robert A. Peterson, *Christian Theology: The Biblical Story and Our Faith* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2020), 9, ProQuest Ebook Central.

³⁵ Ibid.

Dispensationalism. A dispensation refers to a period during which a steward carries out a specific arrangement or management.³⁶ Dispensationalism takes two forms: classical and progressive. The dispensational hermeneutic is the product of the 19th century, realized through the work of John Nelson Darby and James Hall Brookes.³⁷ Dispensationalism is a theological approach that maintains a pre-tribulation rapture of the church, rooted in the distinctions between Israel and the church as two peoples of God.³⁸ This approach adheres to a rigid scriptural interpretation, commonly disregarding contextual elements and the principle of the analogy of faith, which involves using Scripture to interpret Scripture.³⁹ The hermeneutical approach employed by dispensationalism underscores a significant disparity between the Old and New Testaments.⁴⁰ In addition, dispensationalism has unique eschatological beliefs, such as the rapture of the church, and differs from the hermeneutic of covenant theology.⁴¹

Gospel. The term ‘gospel’ comes from the Greek transliteration *euaggelion* and refers to the good news of salvation for sinful humanity, achieved by the completed work of the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ.⁴² This principle Christian message is based on the life, teachings, crucifixion, and ascension of Jesus Christ.⁴³ It is essential to recognize that the gospel is not

³⁶ Brent E. Parker, and Richard J. Lucas, eds., *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022), 116.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 156.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 158.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Jason G. Duesing and Nathan A. Finn, eds., *Historical Theology for the Church* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2021), 253, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² John Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2022), 99.

⁴³ Hessert, *Introduction to Christianity*, 78.

restricted to a mere proclamation of the good news about Jesus; instead, Jesus embodies the good news itself.⁴⁴

Human effort or free will. As autonomous beings, humans are not bound by external constraints or obstacles beyond their influence. They possess a range of options and possess the capacity to reason and weigh alternatives to make decisions based on their own volition.⁴⁵ They possess the power to opt for a different course of action than their present one.⁴⁶

Incarnation of God. The traditional belief states that God entered humanity's temporal world by taking on flesh as the Messiah named Jesus of Nazareth.⁴⁷ The concept of hypostatic union is a cornerstone of the incarnation, affirming that Jesus Christ embodies God and man.⁴⁸ Despite assuming human form, God did not relinquish His divinity or cease to be God. In the person of Jesus, He was both fully divine and fully human.⁴⁹

Law. In the Bible, the term 'law' holds two distinct meanings: general and specific. Specifically, it pertains to the Torah, a portion of Scripture consisting of the first five books of the Old Testament.⁵⁰ It may also refer to the comprehensive guidance of God found throughout both the New and Old Testament, or it can denote the entirety of the Old Testament compared to the New Testament.⁵¹ Generally, law is a term that refers to imperatives that declare the will of God. It guides humanity towards actions that are in accordance with God's desires while

⁴⁴ Hessert, *Introduction to Christianity*, 78.88.

⁴⁵ Henry, *Basics of the Faith*, 19.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Thomas Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 33, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Law*, 1.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

discouraging actions that are displeasing to Him.⁵² Essentially, it provides a set of commandments that individuals can follow to align themselves with God's divine will. This researcher will use the term 'law' in this general sense for this project.

Legalism. Legalists believe that the ultimate divine revelation is expressed in the law that only requires obedience and enforcement.⁵³ According to this perspective, humanity's only duty is to comply with this divine law.⁵⁴ It is crucial to acknowledge that legalism is predicated upon the notion that the law is a principle of righteousness before God, encompassing all aspects of moral conduct. This perspective emphasizes obedience to the law as the primary means of pleasing God and attaining righteousness.⁵⁵ Legalism, therefore, asserts that the law is paramount and that adherence to it is essential. This belief system has been influential in religious and philosophical traditions throughout history, and its implications continue to be debated in contemporary discourse.

Progressive sanctification. The process of transforming believers to reflect the character and ways of God through the active engagement of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁶ The Holy Spirit acts as a catalyst in this process and brings about a profound change in individuals, molding them into the likeness of God.⁵⁷ The Holy Spirit's transformative work is a testament to the power of spiritual growth and development, and its significance in shaping the lives of believers cannot be overstated.⁵⁸

⁵² Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Law*, 1.

⁵³ Hessert, *Introduction to Christianity*, 105.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Henry, *Basics of the Faith*, 176.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 177.

Reformed theology. In the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, Reformed theology, under the leadership of the Augustinian monk Martin Luther, chose to break away from the Catholic church.⁵⁹ By doing so, they could continue the confessions of the early church founders.⁶⁰ Reformed theology is rooted in the principles of focusing on the sovereignty of God, the authority of Scripture, and the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith.⁶¹ In accordance with Reformed theology, covenantal and confessional teachings represent integral elements that often serve as defining characteristics through which doctrinal statements are formulated.⁶² As such, these teachings hold significant importance in the theological tradition, encapsulating the fundamental values and beliefs that underpin this school of thought.⁶³ One of the fundamental principles of reformed theology is the Five *Solas*, which come from the Latin word *sola*, meaning alone. These are *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone), *sola gratia* (grace alone), *sola Christus* (Christ alone), *sola fide* (faith alone), and *sola Deo gloria* (to God alone be the glory).⁶⁴

Sanctification. The concept of sanctification in Christianity refers to the state of being set apart and declared holy by God, owing to the work of Jesus Christ that is external to the believer and is made manifest in the believer through the glorious union in Christ.⁶⁵ Throughout the Christian life, sanctification involves an immediate act and continuous action of being set apart

⁵⁹ Scott M. Manetsch, *The Reformation and the Irrepressible Word of God: Interpretation, Theology, and Practice* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 6, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 25–39.

⁶² Beeke, *Reformed Systematic Theology*, 88.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 90–93.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 601.

unto God. Essentially, sanctification is immediate upon coming to Christ while also a lifelong transformation journey as the believer grows closer to God and becomes more like Him.⁶⁶

Sovereignty of God. God reigns supreme over all aspects of the universe. He orchestrates and regulates every process and occurrence to fulfill His divine plan.⁶⁷ While He may permit certain events to transpire in accordance with the natural laws, all that exists He created, and it belongs to Him, and He governs over it all.⁶⁸ No one can thwart His counsel, impede His purpose, or rebel against His will.⁶⁹ Therefore, God's sovereignty directly refers to His supreme authority and power over all that exists by either command or permission.⁷⁰

Union with Christ. Union with Christ is a central aspect of spiritual growth, considered through definitive sanctification as one wholly separated from the world and in union with the resurrected Christ.⁷¹ This union is transformative as the Holy Spirit conforms believers to Christ, leading to a complete transformation in the eschaton.⁷² Through this union, believers are united with God and transformed by His grace.⁷³ Additionally, believers derive strength, comfort, and guidance and experience a sense of purpose and meaning that transcends the limitations of this

⁶⁶ Beeke, *Reformed Systematic Theology*, 601.

⁶⁷ Lee Thai, *Boundaries of Freedom: The Quantum Proposal of Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2019), 16, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 16.

⁷⁰ R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2021), 31, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁷¹ G. K. Beale, *Union with the Resurrected Christ: Eschatological New Creation and New Testament Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2023), 26, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁷² Robert Letham, *Systematic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 564, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁷³ Ibid.

earthly existence.⁷⁴ Ferguson states, “The dominant motive and architectonic principle of the order of salvation should, therefore, be union with Christ in the Spirit.”⁷⁵

Wesleyan-Arminian theology. Wesleyan doctrine repudiates the notion that divine sovereignty is absolute in salvation and posits that unconverted sinners possess partial freedom in their will.⁷⁶ Consequently, Wesleyans perceive spiritual progression as a collaborative endeavor between God and humanity; God does some, and the believer does some.⁷⁷

Limitations

The first limitation of this project was attendance, which could have been influenced by various factors. Consistent attendance could have proven problematic because the teaching program occurred over approximately ten weeks. The participant community was primarily an agricultural economy with limited available workers. During seasonal periods such as planting, harvesting, calving, and feeding, the entire ministry membership took up active roles in production and limited participation in the teaching program. The extent of this limitation depended on when the program was initiated. This factor could have been listed as delimitation. However, the lack of a definitive time frame was a constraint that led to uncertainty, thus rendering it a limitation.

A second restriction was weather-related. The climatic conditions in this locality posed a significant challenge. The weather patterns in this valley community were highly erratic and challenging to anticipate, particularly during the winter and spring seasons. Given the

⁷⁴ Beeke, *Reformed Systematic Theology*, 216.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁷⁷ Edgardo Colón-Emeric, and Mark Gorman, *The Saving Mysteries of Jesus Christ: A Christology in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2019), 56, ProQuest Ebook Central.

predominantly rural nature of the area, participants were scattered over a seventy-five-mile radius. As a result, traversing high-altitude passes with poor visibility would impede participation during unfavorable weather conditions.

A third restraint of this research project was its restricted membership size of thirty-five participants. The size limit of the program created difficulties in terms of participation and diversity of demographics. As a result, the ministry was limited in the number of participants. The selection of participants depended largely on their availability and willingness to attend, which made this factor unpredictable.

Another consequential limit of this research project was its outcome. The researcher intended to develop and instruct a method of comprehending a believer's covenantal union with Christ in sanctification, utilizing a reformed systematic approach. However, since BrandofMan Ministries is a teaching ministry consisting of members from various local churches with diverse theological beliefs, the researcher could not control the extent to which the teachings of these other denominations influenced the project.

Delimitations

The first delimitation was demographics. Due to the size of the ministry and the availability of participants, it was decided that all members over 18 of any ethnicity or gender were eligible to participate. This delimitation based on demographics ensured that no individual was restricted from participation solely based on their age, race, or gender.

A second area of control for this program was the venue. It was held at two separate sites on two different days to ensure that members within a seventy-five-mile radius could participate in the program. The timing was flexible based on local conditions to help alleviate travel and time constraints for attendees. This ensured that more people could attend and have a significant

impact. In addition, BrandofMan Ministries made the program available on multimedia devices for those unable to attend due to unexpected seasonal conditions.

The third delimitation of this program pertained to the curriculum, which was centered on the theological concept of the covenantal union between the believer and Jesus Christ in the context of sanctification. This program espoused a reformed and systematic perspective, and as such, the curriculum was designed to reflect this theological approach. Specifically, the curriculum abstained from addressing the topic of sanctification from other theological or doctrinal vantage points.

Another aspect to consider concerns the course's objectives. Embracing Spiritual Growth was designed to help students comprehend the complex connection between God and humanity. It highlighted the importance of a believer's covenantal union with Christ as a crucial initial step toward addressing knowledge and practical aspects related to spiritual growth.

For the fifth delimitation, the research variables were defined. The researcher's focus was self-limited to include literature published within the past five to ten years from the thesis statement. A careful management approach was implemented to ensure that the themes and sub-themes from the current literature were aligned with the purpose statement.

The sixth delimitation encompassed a determined time of instruction. The members of BrandofMan Ministries had various schedules filled with the needs of work and family. Therefore, the researcher crafted a time-efficient program to cater to their needs. The sessions comprised a forty-five-minute lecture, followed by a fifteen-minute question and answer period, allowing participants to engage with the curriculum actively. This fixed instruction time ensured that everyone could maximize their attendance and learning experience.

The final delimitation was the learning medium and material. Participants had access to various resources and materials throughout the program. The primary resource was a comprehensive PowerPoint presentation (see Appendix N) with topics explicitly created for the intended thesis, complemented by an outline handout (see Appendix O). This handout was thoughtfully designed to assist participants in taking notes and identifying critical points for future reference and interaction. In addition, the researcher supplied folders, writing materials, and highlighters to ensure that every participant had the necessary tools to make the most of their experience.

Thesis Statement

To assist individuals in deepening their understanding of their covenant union with Christ and utilizing that knowledge to facilitate spiritual growth, they needed to have a solid grasp of the biblical concept of sanctification. Paul's pastoral advice recorded in 2 Timothy 3:16 encouraged teachers to utilize Scripture for training in righteousness. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul expounded on the concept of righteousness attained through faith in Christ (Phil 3:9). Hence, all individuals involved in this project needed to ponder their faith in Christ and recognize that it is an unearned gift from God. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph 2:8–9, New American Standard). Accordingly, sanctification represented a divine manifestation of grace characterized by the renewal and transformation of an individual's life. It was an act of divine intervention, working towards the emergence of a new and elevated state of being that was indicative of the faithful.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Chad Van Dixhoorn, ed., *Creeds, Confessions, and Catechisms: A Readers Edition* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 358.

The researcher, who has established a well-developed rapport with the members of BrandofMan Ministries, was well-versed in their learning patterns and behavior. As such, a curriculum was created to cater to the specific requirements of the members. Consequently, a systematic curriculum grounded in reformed theology and delivered through an expository teaching approach was indispensable in equipping adult members with a profound understanding of their covenant union with Christ that they could effectively apply to their lives. The expository teaching style, which involved systematic exposition of the Scripture, was an ideal method for facilitating an understanding of the doctrine of sanctification. However, specific areas of this biblical study needed further attention.

The complex subject of how God's sovereignty and human effort intertwine, particularly within the framework of a covenantal relationship with Christ, necessitated further development. Presenting the Embracing Spiritual Growth curriculum was most effective in a three-phase approach rather than a single sermon format. The researcher intended to implement a ten-week educational program integrating podcast-delivered sermons with in-person classroom instruction and self-study to facilitate a thorough learning environment. Embracing Spiritual Growth was designed to deepen believers' understanding of their union with Christ in sanctification while fostering meaningful interaction with the topic. Through substantive conversation and practical applications, participants gained the knowledge and skills to apply this understanding to their daily lives. Rather than simply reciting facts, this program inspired and motivated participants to embrace God's plan enthusiastically and to share their newfound understanding with others in their community. Embracing Spiritual Growth encouraged active engagement with the topic so believers could grow in their faith and become better equipped to live out their beliefs. If

BrandofMan Ministries implemented Embracing Spiritual Growth, then members would realize their covenant union with Christ, promoting confidence and reducing anxiety in sanctification.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Literature Review

This literature review investigated the spiritual deficit prevalent among the adult members of BrandofMan Ministries. The deficit exposed a noteworthy issue of inadequate understanding and implementation of their covenantal union with Christ, which resulted in anxiety related to the process of sanctification. The literature review provided an in-depth understanding of the issue and leveraged research to address the gap and enhance the knowledge of a believer's covenant union with Christ in sanctification. The researcher conducted this review by extensively investigating the current academic literature, examining a diverse theological perspective of the problem, and performing a conceptual review of the research surrounding various theories about a believer's union with Christ in sanctification. The research was crucial in helping believers understand their theological beliefs, enabling them to apply them to their spiritual growth and reduce associated anxiety. The initial focus is on the topic of sanctification.

Sanctification

Sanctification is closely related to spiritual growth, beginning at conversion and continuing throughout the life of a believer united in Christ.¹ This researcher utilizes sanctification and spiritual growth synonymously; the former is theological, while the latter is

¹ Ben C. Dunson, "Biblical Words and Theological Meanings: Sanctification as Consecration for Transformation," *Themelios* 44, no. 1 (2019): 70, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=33h&AN=425411&site=ehost-live&scope=site&custid=liberty&authtype=ip,shib>

practical. Sanctification is a firmly established biblical doctrine that necessitates careful examination as a monergistic act of God that occurs instantaneously and continues throughout the lifetime of a Christian. It has significant implications for a believer's standing before God and their lifelong process of spiritual growth.² According to Beeke, the term 'sanctification' denotes a twofold process. First, it signifies an initial and definitive work God has accomplished for everyone he chooses.³ Second, it implies the ongoing work that God is carrying out in the lives of such individuals to perfect them.⁴

Definitive Sanctification

Jae-Eun Park, a professor of systematic theology, noted that the 18th-century theologian John Murray challenged the conventional understanding of sanctification by introducing the biblical principle of definitive sanctification.⁵ Likewise, Horton's exposition of Murray's principle challenged the Roman Catholic doctrine of sanctification, which posits that the process of a believer's improvement in obedience throughout their life is a result of God decisively infusing righteousness into them.⁶ Horton asserted that Murray's principle of definitive sanctification aligned with the tenets of reformed theology, emphasizing the imputation of holiness instead of the Catholic principle of infusion.⁷ Specifically, it differentiated between justification and sanctification without creating a division between the two. Again, Park

² Dunson, "Biblical Words and Theological Meanings," 70.

³ Joel Beeke, and Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology, Volume 3: Spirit and Salvation*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 614, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 616.

⁵ Jae-Eun Park, *Driven by God: Active Justification and Definitive Sanctification in the Soteriology of Bavinck, Comrie, Witsius, and Kuyper* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018), 13, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁶ Michael Horton, *Calvin on the Christian Life: Glorifying and Enjoying God Forever* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 111, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁷ *Ibid.*

underscored the principle of definitive sanctification by emphasizing the indispensable significance of a believer's union with Christ, which signifies the attainment of a state of holiness that has already been consummated.⁸ According to Park and Horton's perspectives, attaining spiritual growth for a believer necessitates the initial intervention of God, who must act by irrevocably sanctifying them.⁹

The concept of definitive sanctification can cause spiritual growth anxiety among believers due to their fallen state, which hinders their acceptance of this act of God. Beeke supports this argument, emphasizing that being united with Christ immediately results in a transfer from a domain ruled by sin to a domain governed by grace, marking a decisive shift in a person's spiritual state, a critical element in addressing spiritual growth anxiety.¹⁰ In addition, Henry argues that sanctification begins with a gracious gift definitively bestowed by a creator upon His creation, the calling by the Father into a union with His son.¹¹ Scripture supports Henry's argument. In his epistles to the Corinthians, Paul repeatedly references sanctification as a significant event from the past that was decisive and immediately confirmed through a blood covenant.¹² Horton argues that without being definitively sanctified and having a righteousness imputed to them that is not their own, believers may be uncertain whether God is genuinely gracious.¹³ When definitive sanctification is discarded or not realized, the practical outcome is a paralyzing focus on morality and constant anxiety about a person's standing with God.¹⁴ This

⁸ Park, *Driven by God*, 14.

⁹ Barrett, *40 Questions About*, 206.

¹⁰ Beeke, and Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology*, 616.

¹¹ Henry, *Basics of the Faith*, 175.

¹² *Ibid.*, 178.

¹³ Horton, *Calvin on the Christian*, 113.

¹⁴ Payne, *Already Sanctified: A Theology*, 18.

leads to a dangerous assumption about the amount of grace one needs and one's ability to position oneself to receive it.¹⁵

Progressive Sanctification

Progressive sanctification is a journey, not a destination. It involves applying Christian truths that build upon the foundation laid by definitive sanctification. It is a continuous growth in spiritual maturity through the work of the Holy Spirit as believers strive to conform to Christ's image. This ongoing process should be a source of encouragement and motivation for believers, knowing that they are continually growing and maturing in their faith.¹⁶ It is crucial to exercise caution and thoughtfulness when distinguishing between definitive and progressive sanctification. This distinction is not a matter of mere semantics, but it has significant implications for understanding the Christian life and one's relationship with God. It requires careful reflection and consideration.

Gordon Fee notes that the apostle Paul often incorporates the word 'sanctification' in his descriptions of Christian conversion, as evidenced in 2 Thessalonians 2:13.¹⁷ This verse suggests that God initially and definitively applied holiness and purification to His chosen as an integral element to achieving salvation. However, he also employs the term sanctification when expressing concern about a believer's behavior, implying a progressive act of purification over time, as evidenced in 1 Thessalonians 4:3–8.¹⁸ Specific to this verse, Paul uses the word sanctification to address the issue of sexual immorality among believers. He emphasizes the

¹⁵ Payne, *Already Sanctified: A Theology*, 18.

¹⁶ Vick, *Justification: By Grace*, 76.

¹⁷ Gordon D. Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2023), 78, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

significance of moral conduct by reminding them of their conversion and obligation to conform to the expected ethical standards. Paul's sanctification theology emphasizes the parallel importance of the believer's continuous development and maturation and the singular and decisive act, which are intrinsically linked to the individual's possession of the Holy Spirit.¹⁹ While the former involves the liberation of believers from the bondage of sin, the latter pertains to their ongoing struggle with the same.²⁰

Park emphasized that the progressive sanctification of the believer can be summed up in one word: growth.²¹ However, when progressive sanctification becomes heavily influenced by personal performance instead of an act of divine grace, spiritual growth is reduced to a sliding scale, and the certainty of anxiety comes with it.²²

Spiritual Growth Anxiety

Spiritual growth anxiety can manifest in several ways and means in the life of a believer. This is evident in the parable of the "Sower of Seeds" (Matt 13:3–8), where the standard conditions of life can hinder the biblical perspective of spiritual growth.²³ Thus, the issue of spiritual growth anxiety has been a longstanding challenge for believers. Those in union with Christ are no exception. Unfortunately, Christians often face the temptation of shifting their focus from Christ to the practical aspects of living a Christian life.²⁴ As a result, they end up

¹⁹ Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People*, 78.

²⁰ Payne, *Already Sanctified: A Theology*, 84.

²¹ Park, *Driven by God*, 37.

²² Payne, *Already Sanctified: A Theology*, 27.

²³ Stuart K. Weber, *Holman New Testament Commentary: Matthew* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2000), 192–93.

²⁴ Michael Allen, *Sanctification* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 169.

viewing the Christian life as separate from the person and work of Christ.²⁵ This separation often appears in a believer as fear, worry, impatience, and apprehension when they rely too heavily on their performance for spiritual growth, thus diminishing the sovereignty of God. This anxiety leads to cluttered thought processes among believers, as they become overly concerned with their performance, leading to unnecessary self-evaluation and doubts about God's faithfulness.²⁶

The concept of God's sovereignty over spiritual growth is essential to understanding sanctification and its associated anxiety.²⁷ For God to possess sovereignty, it is imperative that He also possesses omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience.²⁸ Any limitation in these areas would render Him devoid of sovereignty and, consequently, He would cease to be God.²⁹ Thus, any attempt to understand the nature of spiritual growth anxiety must consider God's sovereign role in shaping events.

The divine sovereignty in sanctification stands in contrast to human agency. The propensity for rebellion has been ingrained in human nature since ancient times. However, this inclination has become more pervasive in modern times, causing some Christians to prioritize popular culture and human endeavor over God's authority in the decision-making process of believers' lives.³⁰ Similarly, the church assumes a role in this contrast, inviting individuals to repent by polite persuasion without emphasizing God's demand for complete submission to His authority.³¹ As a result, believers minimize the supremacy of God in the process of spiritual

²⁵ Michael Allen, *Sanctification* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 169.

²⁶ James P. Gills, *God's Rx for Fear and Worry: Biblical Wisdom Confirmed by Science* (Chicago, IL: Charisma House, 2019), 10–11, ProQuest Ebook Central.

²⁷ Thai, *Boundaries of Freedom*, 4.

²⁸ Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, 164.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 170.

³¹ *Ibid.*

growth, resulting in heightened levels of anxiety, directly impacting their emotional and psychological well-being.³² This, in turn, leads to a state of unease and uncertainty about their progress in Christ, causing them to become pessimistic, fault-finding, and judgmental of not only themselves but the spiritual growth of others, thereby adversely affecting their social interactions and relationships.³³

Every instance of God's sovereignty reflects His grace, which is the foundation of sanctification. Only by God's grace is faith provided for spiritual growth.³⁴ Individuals seeking spiritual growth must refrain from perceiving their faith as a mere act of righteousness, as this notion inaccurately implies that one can connect with God through good deeds alone.³⁵ Such a mindset often leads to fear of inadequacy and pursuing secular performance in spiritual growth. Christian ethics cannot be comprehended theologically without a grounding in sanctification through grace and not works.³⁶ Grace in sanctification manifests as spiritual blessings generously bestowed upon those without the merit to earn them without expecting compensation.³⁷ Moreover, grace is a testament to God's sovereignty and a shining example of His sanctifying favor.

Nevertheless, this notion raises some thought-provoking questions about human effort in spiritual development. If God is sovereign, can human action affect spiritual growth? In

³² Gills, *God's Rx for Fear*, 11.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Kelly M. Kopic, ed., *Sanctification: Explorations in Theology and Practice* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 32, ProQuest Ebook Central.

³⁵ Ibid., 33.

³⁶ Gifford A. Grobien, *Christian Character Formation: Lutheran Studies of the Law, Anthropology, Worship, and Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2019), 2. ProQuest Ebook Central.

³⁷ Reuben Bredenhof, *Thank God: Becoming More Grateful to the Greatest of Givers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2023), 30, ProQuest Ebook Central.

response, the ethical axiom widely acknowledged in progressive theology posits that the coercion of a man by God ought to be avoided, as such an act will lead to the mechanization of man's endeavors.³⁸ This assertion contradicts the Scriptural passages, where God explicitly prevents people from sinning against Him and others (Gen 20:6).³⁹ Likewise, this notion contradicts reformed theology and much of the writing of Paul, where even though believers are free from the effects of sin by way of the atonement, they are not free to sin against God. Pink, in line with the teachings of Paul, emphasizes that humanity's correct response to God's sovereignty is not to proclaim oppression but to delight in an effort of servitude.⁴⁰

To apply human effort to spiritual growth, one must understand that it is intertwined with free will; one cannot be held accountable for one's actions without the ability to make choices free of external influence.⁴¹ This means that a decision could have been made differently if the individual had chosen to do so.⁴² However, the autonomy of human effort is subject to God's sovereignty, where the volition of man and the will of God are always in harmony.⁴³ Thus, in the context of reformed orthodoxy, the freedom of humanity to apply effort to spiritual growth is always attributed to God.⁴⁴ When believers exceed what God provides and allow the human portion of action in spiritual growth to take over, they compromise the crucial principle of God's sovereignty. As a result, they can develop anxiety because the burden is unsustainable. This is

³⁸ Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, 107.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 105.

⁴¹ Thai, *Boundaries of Freedom*, 7.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Kapic, *Sanctification: Explorations in Theology*, 117.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 116.

significant for researching the relationship between God's sovereignty and human effort in sanctification.

When addressing anxiety related to spiritual growth, it is necessary to consider the theological perspective that considers the current state of mankind as '*status corruptionis*'.⁴⁵ *Status corruptionis* refers to the federal and total corruption that resulted from the fall, where humans are now capable of sinning and incapable of not sinning.⁴⁶ It suggests that human effort is subject to total depravity and chance, which conflict with sovereignty.⁴⁷ Consequently, for human effort to play a role in spiritual growth, it must be affected definitively and progressively by a holy and transcendent force, causally determining a desire to advance spiritual growth.⁴⁸

According to Geerhardus Vos, human nature comprises two distinct substances: body and soul, where the latter is separate from but complimentary to the former.⁴⁹ Vos posited that the *imago Dei*, which denotes the image of God, represents an inherent and self-evident characteristic that sets humans apart from all other creatures.⁵⁰ According to him, humans are naturally inclined to communicate with God, and for all the faculties of their souls to fulfill their intended purpose, they must be grounded in God.⁵¹

As humans turned away from their faith and gave into sinful behavior, they tarnished *imago Dei*. Rather than accepting their likeness to God as enough, they craved to attain godlike

⁴⁵ Joshua R. Farris, *An Introduction to Theological Anthropology: Humans, Both Creaturely and Divine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), 101, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Sproul, *Chosen by God*, 199.

⁴⁸ Thai, *Boundaries of Freedom*, 23.

⁴⁹ Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 219.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 230.

⁵¹ Ibid.

status. This condition is commonly referred to as high anthropology or perfectionism.⁵² It is common to want to achieve perfection, but expecting too much from oneself can result in spiritual growth anxiety, a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion often caused by unnecessary self-analysis and hypercriticism of spiritual performance.⁵³ This can happen when believers set unrealistic expectations or hold themselves to a higher standard of perfection than is currently attainable.⁵⁴

Many Christians believe that the *imago Dei*, or God's image, is humanity's most authentic aspect. This is another form of high anthropology. According to this principle, for believers to grow spiritually, they should always strive to fulfill and promote the *imago Dei* in themselves and others.⁵⁵ This is an admirable perspective but ultimately unattainable through humanity's fallen state. When confronted with the challenges of promoting the theological concept of *imago Dei*, believers may experience a sense of unease, prompting them to engage in introspection and question the reasons behind their perceived inability to reflect the image of God as effectively as others. By upholding high anthropology, believers continue to adhere to a performance-based approach to sanctification, whereby biblical mandates serve as a means of earning merit toward righteousness.

Fodor and Ticciati point to Luther's teachings and most reformed spiritual growth dogmatics as the preferred approach to the *imago Dei*. These teachings center around low anthropology, whereby humans acknowledge their complete dependence on God's care for their

⁵² Zahl, *Low Anthropology: The Unlikely*, 26.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Grobrien, *Christian Character Formation*, 100.

very being, especially sanctification.⁵⁶ This acknowledgment leads to the understanding that sanctification can be achieved only through God’s grace, as humans cannot attain it alone.⁵⁷

Fodor and Ticciati emphasize that if the image of God is reduced to a mere matter of human reason, that will lead to spiritual growth based on self-justification, which, they concluded, does not correspond to the message of the gospel.⁵⁸

Views of Sanctification

The anxiety experienced during spiritual growth is often due to one’s perception of their relationship with God, specifically a believer’s union with Christ. Dane Ortlund outlines four distinct perspectives Christians hold regarding spiritual growth in sanctification: “God then me, God not me, God plus me, and God in me.”⁵⁹

The God-then-me approach is mutually exclusive and holds that spiritual growth begins with God’s sovereign action, followed by human effort.⁶⁰ This view of sanctification posits that God is the sole agent of the believer’s spiritual growth. He initiates the process by quickening the soul, regenerating it, and imparting new life.⁶¹ After that, the believer must serve God and develop in Christ’s likeness. Tony Evans characterizes the God-then-me principle as “a new definition of obedience,” where God, through Christ, has built in a whole new set of wants and desires that manifest as obedience within the Christian.⁶² This approach aligns with

⁵⁶ Jim Fodor and Susannah Ticciati, eds., *Theological Anthropology, 500 Years after Martin Luther: Orthodox and Protestant Perspectives* (Boston, MA: BRILL, 2021), 19, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁹ Dane C. Ortlund, *Deeper: Real Change for Real Sinners* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 53.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Tony Evans, *Kingdom Living: The Essentials of Spiritual Growth* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2022), 188, ProQuest Ebook Central.

Arminianism’s tenets, inspiring a legalistic, merit-based approach to spiritual growth.⁶³ The God-then-me principle also carries implications of open theism, emphasizing a dynamic relationship between God and the world, characterized by mutual interaction and exchange.⁶⁴ According to Wellum, open theists believe that any principle of sanctification that does not prioritize the God-then-me relationship fails to reflect the relational and loving nature of the God depicted in the Scriptures.⁶⁵ In this view, God influences the church, and the church also have the capacity to influence Him.⁶⁶ This perspective of progressive sanctification is directly refuted by the apostle Paul in Romans 8:7–8. Additionally, the God-then-me perspective does not account for the constant need for grace due to human sin and God’s ongoing mercy throughout the believer’s life.⁶⁷ Consequently, anxiety develops when the believer cannot meet the requirements of biblical imperatives for spiritual growth. Although the imperatives are invaluable for believers striving to live holy lives and guiding them in what is necessary to please God, it is essential to recognize that these imperatives cannot, in and of themselves, provide the power to achieve this goal.⁶⁸ Luther characterized this approach as a “Theology of Glory,” where people prefer their work to Christ’s on the cross.⁶⁹ Due to a lack of scriptural backing and an unwarranted reliance on human

⁶³ Thai, *Boundaries of Freedom*, 41.

⁶⁴ Stephen J. Wellum, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1: From Canon to Concept* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2024), 123, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ John MacArthur, *Sanctification: God’s Passion for His People* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 18, Kindle.

⁶⁸ Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between*, 30.

⁶⁹ Caleb Keith, and Kelsi Klembara., ed. *Theology of the Cross: Luther’s Heidelberg Disputation & Reflections on its 28 Theses* (Irvine, CA: 1517 Publishing, 2018), 31.

endeavor, this researcher deemed it necessary to discard the God-then-me approach from the Embracing Spiritual Growth curriculum.⁷⁰

The God-not-me approach stands in direct contrast to the God-then-me approach, as it places exclusive reliance on God’s sovereignty, with human effort assuming a passive ‘let go and let God’ role in the process of Christian growth.⁷¹ Many scholars consider this approach “Hyper-Calvinistic” and antinomian (against the law).⁷² The anxiety that often accompanies this view results from lawlessness in the literal sense and a diminishment of a believer’s union with Christ in the theological sense.⁷³ Scholars have raised objections to this perspective because they believe it diminishes the significance of progressive sanctification within the believer’s union with Christ. They argue that this approach is not supported by Scripture and relegates progressive sanctification to a mere footnote.⁷⁴ Although this viewpoint acknowledges the limitation in addressing spiritual growth anxiety, it is considered biblically sound, as it emphasizes the necessity of God’s initial action in the lives of sinners, in line with Jesus’ teachings to Nicodemus in John 3.⁷⁵ The God-not-me principle also parallels the Puritan view of divine providence in spiritual growth. Beeke discusses the Puritan view of the mysterious manifestations of divine providence in the experiences of believers, illustrating how God’s providence oversees a believer’s birth, upbringing, conversion, occupation, family matters,

⁷⁰ Douglas F. Ottati, *A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (Chicago, IL: Eerdmans, 2020), 158, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁷¹ Ortlund, *Deeper: Real Change*, 53.

⁷² Thai, *Boundaries of Freedom*, 25.

⁷³ Whitney G. Gamble, *Christ and the Law* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), 113–14, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁷⁴ Henry, *Basics of the Faith*, 175.

⁷⁵ Thai, *Boundaries of Freedom*, 25.

protection from harm, and sanctification.⁷⁶ Therefore, the God-not-me principle of spiritual growth will be included in the Embracing Spiritual Growth curriculum in part.

The God-plus-me view sees Christian growth as a joint effort between God and the believer, with equal contribution to sanctification.⁷⁷ Cole's perspective supports this approach to spiritual growth, emphasizing that progressive sanctification is predicated upon the conjoined efforts of the Holy Spirit and the believer.⁷⁸ That is to say, spiritual growth is a collaborative endeavor that necessitates active participation from God and humanity. This approach is popular in Wesleyan theology, where a partnership of faith with Christ will produce good fruit seen in the Christian life.⁷⁹ The concept of God-plus-me parallels the concept of a universal call to salvation, which involves the Holy Spirit's influence through prevenient grace, leading individuals to willingly renounce sin and accept Jesus Christ.⁸⁰ Additionally, this viewpoint closely aligns with the concept of entire sanctification wherein the concern for spiritual growth arises from forms of piety that verge on an excessive interest in one's self and merit-based sanctification.⁸¹ Merit-based spiritual growth will inevitably lead to stress and doubt as believers struggle to be good enough to earn or maintain sanctification. As a result, the God-plus-me approach to sanctification is rejected based on weak and conflicting biblical support due to a non-systematic process.⁸²

⁷⁶ Joel R. Beeke, and Brian G. Hedges, *Thriving in Grace: Twelve Ways the Puritans Fuel Spiritual Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2020), 92, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁷⁷ Ortlund, *Deeper: Real Change*, 54.

⁷⁸ Graham A. Cole, *Glorification: An Introduction* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 58, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁷⁹ Colón-Emeric, *The Saving Mysteries of Jesus*, 56.

⁸⁰ The Foundry Publishing, *Global Wesleyan Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology* (Kansas City, MO: The Foundry Publishing, 2020), 64, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁸¹ Payne, *Already Sanctified: A Theology*, 29.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 28.

Ortlund and others believe that the God-in-me approach to sanctification is revealed in the Bible.⁸³ This theological perspective posits that God is the central and continuous agency in the lives of Christians. Through this perspective, a believer, upon salvation, is definitively sanctified by God and permanently united with His Son through the workings of His Spirit.⁸⁴ After someone becomes a believer, the Holy Spirit produces fruit in them. This fruit is shown outwardly throughout their lives as they become more like Christ.⁸⁵ Edwards describes this view of spiritual growth as one in which the believer is entirely passive but fully engaged in different aspects.⁸⁶ Lane illustrates this by comparing definitive and progressive sanctification as two distinct yet inseparable elements in the context of clothing. Specifically, Lane draws attention to the legs of a pair of pants and how they differ from socks.⁸⁷ Although the legs of the pants are distinct pieces, they are joined at the top and cannot be separated.⁸⁸ This contrasts socks that are also distinct from each other but easily separated.⁸⁹ Consequently, definitive and progressive sanctification in the Bible is like the two legs of a pair of pants, distinct yet inseparable. John Calvin described the relationship between definitive and progressive sanctification as the *duplex gratia* or ‘double grace’ that occurs through a union with Christ.⁹⁰ In other words, those united with Christ receive blessings of forgiveness and regeneration from sinfulness, symbolized by

⁸³ Ortlund, *Deeper: Real Change*, 54.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 54–57.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁸⁷ Tony Lane, *Exploring Christian Doctrine: A Guide to What Christians Believe* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 301, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁸⁸ Lane, *Exploring Christian Doctrine*, 301.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Michael T. Christ, “The Value of Marshall’s Gospel Mystery of Sanctification,” *Unio Cum Christo* 5, no. 2 (2019): 115, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=33h&AN=430151&site=ehost-live&scope=site&custid=liberty&authtype=ip,shib>.

Ortlund's God-in-me principle. It is imperative to recognize that the principle of sanctification through a God-in-me approach is contingent upon prioritizing definitive sanctification over progressive sanctification. This is because a union with Christ is not tantamount to definitive sanctification but rather an outcome thereof.⁹¹ In essence, definitive sanctification serves as the foundation for the union with Christ, paving the way for progressive sanctification.⁹²

The God-in-me approach effectively addresses the anxiety accompanying spiritual growth through a covenant union with Christ.⁹³ Upon entering into a covenantal union with Christ (God-in-me), a believer's spiritual progression relies entirely upon divine grace expressed through human action.⁹⁴ Ortlund explains this union with Christ in two ways: federal and personal.⁹⁵ The federal principle emphasizes the union between Christ and the believer, with Christ serving as their representative in sanctification.⁹⁶ In other words, spiritual growth is determined by His authority and leadership rather than the believer's will. The believer's spiritual destiny is thus bound with Christ's. On the other hand, the personal principle focuses on a more intimate union between the believer and Christ.⁹⁷ Scripture offers many ordinary illustrations of this union, such as the marriage relationship (Eph 5:28–29), the vine and branches (John 15:1–17), and the sheep and shepherd (John 10:11–18). Ortlund uses the metaphor of an onion to explain the personal union with Christ. As the believer grows spiritually, each layer that

⁹¹ Nathan Busenitz, "The Substance of Sola Fide: Justification Defended from Scripture in the Writings of the Reformers." *Master's Seminary Journal* 32, no. 1 (2021): 84, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=33h&AN=457459&site=ehost-live&scope=site&custid=liberty&authtype=ip,shib>

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Thai, *Boundaries of Freedom*, 75–78.

⁹⁴ Ortlund, *Deeper: Real Change*, 55.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 57–62.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 57.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 59–60.

defines their secular identity is peeled away until the core is reached.⁹⁸ At this core, without layers, the truth is revealed; they are in union with Christ.⁹⁹ When believers realize their union with Christ is at the core of their identity, they can relinquish their anxiety about spiritual growth. They understand that reliance on anything outside of Christ is fruitless.

Union with Christ

The researcher proposes an innovative way to address anxiety related to spiritual growth that runs parallel to the believer's union with Christ. Wilbourne points out that believers are more inclined to connect Christ with their sanctification as an external force rather than recognizing Him as someone who resides within them and has merged His life with theirs.¹⁰⁰ The concept of the unification of Christ with the believer encapsulates Ortlund's God-in-me principle.¹⁰¹ This new perspective is founded on the principles of Covenant theology, the new covenant union in Christ, the incarnation, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Covenant

The covenant's significance in the context of spiritual growth is that it provides a framework for understanding how humanity can experience sanctification through a God-in-me union with Christ. Specifically, the covenant is a testament to God's unifying and relational nature with humanity.¹⁰² Therefore, an understanding of the covenant is essential for a precise

⁹⁸ Ortlund, *Deeper: Real Change*, 56–57.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Rankin Wilbourne, *Union with Christ: The Way to Know and Enjoy God* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2016), 35.

¹⁰¹ Ortlund, *Deeper: Real Change*, 55.

¹⁰² Stephen G. Myers, *God to Us: Covenant Theology in Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2021), 1.

interpretation of all aspects of God's self-revelation. Michael Horton highlights Calvin's teaching that the covenant of grace, which is unified across the Old and New Testaments, serves as the foundation for the communion of saints in Christ.¹⁰³ This theological concept is intricately intertwined with the Christian life in sanctification. Consequently, the covenantal nature of a believer's union with Christ is not only eternally assured but unbreakable as the Lord is a covenant God.¹⁰⁴

Gentry and Wellum take a progressive perspective on covenant theology where God's redemptive plan is unveiled through covenants in two primary ways.¹⁰⁵ First, it is manifested concurrently through the promised relationships that God establishes with His created beings.¹⁰⁶ Second, God's plan of redemption through covenant has evolved over time, playing a key role in undoing the consequences of the fall of humanity and carrying out the divine plan of redemption.¹⁰⁷ In the progressive view, the organic development of several covenants has been pivotal in bringing God's kingdom to fruition through His incarnate Son and, ultimately, enabling salvation and sanctification through His life and work.¹⁰⁸ Covenant progression has been evidenced through typological patterns within a promise-fulfillment theme.¹⁰⁹ Believers can trace these patterns to realize their fulfillment initially in Christ and subsequently in themselves as His chosen people (2 Cor 1:20).¹¹⁰ While Gentry and Wellum focus on a progressive form of

¹⁰³ Horton, *Calvin on the Christian Life*, 47.

¹⁰⁴ Richard P. Belcher, *The Fulfillment of the Promises of God: An Explanation of Covenant Theology* (Geanies House, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications Ltd, 2020), 259.

¹⁰⁵ Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 651.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 652.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 653.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 655.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 657.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

covenantal theology that includes elements of dispensationalism, this project will utilize classic covenant theology to illustrate that a believer's union with Christ is covenantal.

Horton contemplated Calvin's exposition of classic covenant theology, which posits that humans were created in God's image and likeness for covenantal fellowship.¹¹¹ According to this view, humanity was created not for its own sake but for the purpose of fellowship with God and with one another.¹¹² In his analysis, he determined that while God is not dependent on mankind, He made the choice to create them as partners in His covenant.¹¹³ When it comes to the covenant's importance in a believer's union with Christ during their sanctification, they automatically consider themselves when they think of God, and vice versa.¹¹⁴ This means that understanding God is intertwined with experiencing Him, eliminating the need for sanctification based on performance and the associated anxiety. Horton reiterated Calvin's views on the covenantal union of believers with Christ, emphasizing that God meets the church in peace as promised, with the entire covenant community throughout redemptive history by utilizing the appointed means of the covenant for delivering Christ and His benefits.¹¹⁵

Classic covenant theology emphasizes God's unconditioned and unchangeable grace in Jesus Christ. According to Horton, in a covenant union with Christ, it is crucial to acknowledge that a Christian's obedience in their spiritual development is a result of God's gracious intention and promise in union with Christ.¹¹⁶ Ortlund emphasizes the concept of covenantal union with Christ by highlighting the "God-in-me" principle. He underscores the believer's safety and

¹¹¹ Horton, *Calvin on the Christian Life*, 51.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 136.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

security in the fundamental nature of this principle, such that spiritual growth occurs with the remarkable inevitability or even invincibility of the believer's union with God in Christ.¹¹⁷

Therefore, Christian obedience does not earn a believer spiritual growth but is a natural outcome of their covenant union with Christ. Ortlund explains that the dynamics of human relationships are inherently fluctuating.¹¹⁸ While believers may express unwavering devotion to God, human nature is often unpredictable. Therefore, God established a covenant to solidify the relationship with His chosen ones, particularly in the context of a union with Christ, through a new covenant.¹¹⁹

Block highlights Paul's teachings that every believer is marked by the Spirit of God as a new covenant sign of their union with Christ.¹²⁰ Rankin Wilbourne states, "Nothing is more central or more basic than a believer's union with Christ."¹²¹ Christ is the key to God's promises in the new covenant, granting blessings to His followers immediately and progressively in sanctification.¹²² Chad Bird emphasizes the significance of Christ as the covenant key by leveraging the principle of metalepsis.¹²³ He suggests that the Bible repeatedly echoes the past, each time recapturing the original context, ultimately leading to the establishment of the new covenant in Christ.¹²⁴ Similarly, Ortlund discusses this covenant progression to Christ using

¹¹⁷ Ortlund, *Deeper: Real Change*, 55–56.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 29–30.

¹²⁰ Daniel I. Block, *Covenant: The Framework of God's Grand Plan of Redemption* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic), 358, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹²¹ Wilbourne, *Union with Christ*, 37.

¹²² Waters, *Covenant Theology*, 618.

¹²³ Chad Bird, *The Christ Key: Unlocking the Centrality of Christ in the Old Testament* (Irvine, CA: 1517 Publishing, 2021), 19.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

Henry Scougal's *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*.¹²⁵ He notes that the believer's promised union with Christ through the new covenant is "a union of the soul with God, a real participation of the divine nature."¹²⁶ The new covenant between Jesus and His followers, like all of God's covenants, is unbreakable and based on His life, death, and resurrection. Block emphasizes that the new covenant is foundational to a believer's relationship with Him and plays a significant role in their definitive and progressive sanctification.¹²⁷ Waters argues that the divine work of sanctification in the new covenant does not entail empowering individuals to exceed the moral code outlined in the Ten Commandments, as this would necessitate surpassing the limitations of their inherent humanity.¹²⁸ Instead, in the new covenant, God redeems lawless humanity through their union with Christ, sanctifying them definitively and progressively through His Spirit, which indwells the believer by engraving the moral law onto their hearts and enabling them to live by it.¹²⁹ Believers are sanctified by their covenantal union with Christ but cannot remain passive. They must always strive through the power of the Spirit to obedience.¹³⁰

Incarnation

The concept of the union between God and humanity through Jesus Christ can challenge Christians seeking to comprehend their identity and purpose in the contemporary world. Torrance underscores the incomprehensibility of God becoming human within the framework of ordinary historical science, asserting that this event encompasses an act of the eternal God and,

¹²⁵ Ortlund, *Deeper: Real Change*, 61.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Block, *Covenant: The Framework of God's*, 358.

¹²⁸ Waters, *Covenant Theology*, 632.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 650–52.

thus, transcends ordinary historical analysis.¹³¹ This union is central to the human experience, and the incarnation of Jesus serves as a key to unlocking its significance.¹³² The concept of the Incarnation carries significant theological implications for believers in spiritual growth, particularly in terms of self-identity and the divine-human relationship. The Incarnation is exclusively an act of God; it is the uniting of the divine and human natures in Jesus Christ and cannot be replicated by mankind.¹³³ As a result, individuals cannot achieve their own sanctification, neither in a definitive nor in a progressive manner. The concept of Jesus as the human manifestation of God reconciles challenges of the apparent contradiction between a physical embodiment and a spiritual connection with believers.¹³⁴ The essential aspect of this doctrine is the assertion that Jesus Christ represents the epitome of true humanity, providing believers with a tangible example of what it means to be human and what it means to be spiritually “in Christ.”¹³⁵

Regarding spiritual development, the concept of being made in the image of God, as manifested in the incarnation, requires believers to be “in Christ.” Parker notes that the doctrine of the incarnation elucidates that humanity, in its fallen state, is separated from Jesus Christ, who represents a new creation.¹³⁶ As such, those who believe in Christ are transformed through a

¹³¹ Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 60, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 218.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹³⁴ Anna Case-Winters, *God Will Be All in All: Theology through the Lens of Incarnation* (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation), 44, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹³⁶ Parker, *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies*, 103.

monergistic act of God, into a new creation in the Spirit, both as individuals and as a corporate body represented by the church.¹³⁷

Another critical of the incarnation is that it enabled Christ's crucifixion and subsequent resurrection. The absence of the incarnation would preclude His death, and without Christ's death, there would be no resurrection, and without His resurrection, sanctification would be unattainable.¹³⁸ The idea of incarnation significantly shifts the way that believers perceive God and their spiritual growth. Torrance observes that God, at times, is considered a distant and uninvolved deity entirely separate from the world, a perspective that does not easily align with the concept of a union between God and man.¹³⁹ However, when Christians view God through the incarnation, they see His relationship with the world in a new light.¹⁴⁰

Incarnation holds immense significance in definitive and progressive sanctification, as Jesus is recognized as the divine source from which all things flow. This notion serves as a reminder that all of God's sovereign designs are comprehensively fulfilled in Christ alone (Heb 1:1–3). Any misinterpretation of the doctrine of incarnation can be attributed to a flawed perception of Christ, leading to anxiety in spiritual growth.¹⁴¹

Holy Spirit

Campbell highlights that the believer's union with Christ entails a monergistic action by God via the Holy Spirit, facilitated through the expression of faith, which is also a result of the

¹³⁷ Parker, *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies*, 103.

¹³⁸ Witt, *Mapping Atonement: The Doctrine*, 157.

¹³⁹ Torrance, *Incarnation*, 15.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Wellum, *The Person of Christ*, 130.

Spirit's work.¹⁴² In his reflection on Calvin's *Institutes*, Vanhoozer notes that the emphasis on the concept is that without Christ's presence within a person, the benefits of salvation, such as sanctification, will be ineffectual and insignificant.¹⁴³ As he explained, the Holy Spirit is responsible for bringing an individual into a state of union with Christ.¹⁴⁴ He adds that the basic premise of Calvin concerning a believer's union with Christ is not one of being born again simply by believing but by receiving new life through the power of the Spirit.¹⁴⁵ Therefore, a believer's union with Christ is grounded in the belief that the Spirit is the one directing the believer toward a deeper understanding of Christ's teachings and his redemptive mission (John 14:16–17). As highlighted by Beale, the Spirit enables believers to engage in kingdom work and uphold the Christian testimony of Jesus Christ.¹⁴⁶ Ortlund stresses the significance of the Holy Spirit in a believer's sanctification in union with Christ, "If you are in Christ, you have everything you need to grow. You are united to Christ: by the Holy Spirit, you are in Him, and He is in you. You cannot lose."¹⁴⁷ He adds that a believer could conceptualize their spiritual development as the Son providing illumination and the Spirit providing warmth.¹⁴⁸ Thus, Christians, considering their recent performance of evangelism or their failure to meet a self-imposed goal of reading the Bible in a year, are examples of what can cause unnecessary anxiety in spiritual growth. Understanding that these actions should be evaluated in light of a believer's

¹⁴² Constantine R. Campbell, Michael J. Thate, and Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Kevin J., eds., *"In Christ" in Paul: Explorations in Paul's Theology of Union and Participation* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 8, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 9.

¹⁴⁶ G. K. Beale, *Union with the Resurrected Christ: Eschatological New Creation and New Testament Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2023), 68, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁴⁷ Ortlund, *Deeper: Real Change*, 64.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 77.

standing in union with Christ is essential and accomplished through the power of the Spirit. Sproul shuts down the argument for performance-based spiritual growth, noting that the solution to overcoming anxiety related to spiritual growth lies in the spiritual life within the soul of a believer united with Christ through the power of the Spirit and not one of performance-based merit.¹⁴⁹ Ortlund emphasizes the significance of the Holy Spirit in realizing the believer's supernatural union with Christ. He underscores that without the Holy Spirit, discussions on this union would remain purely abstract and theoretical.¹⁵⁰ It is through the work of the Spirit that believers are enabled to grow, transforming doctrinal understanding into practical empowerment.¹⁵¹

Theological Foundations

In this section, the researcher will delineate the theological foundations for addressing anxiety in spiritual development through the believer's covenant union with Christ. Specifically, the researcher will employ the doctrine of sanctification, the theology of anxiety, and the didactic God-in-me principle of sanctification.

Theology of Sanctification

R. C. Sproul highlights the biblical teaching that God is the one who sanctifies, both by completion and application.¹⁵² Sanctification is described in the Old Testament using the Hebrew word *qadash*, meaning "to cause, make, pronounce, or observe something to be ceremonially

¹⁴⁹ R. C. Sproul, R. C., *Chosen by God* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2021), 118, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁵⁰ Ortlund, *Deeper: Real Change*, 160.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² Donald Guthrie, *Hebrews*, vol. XV, Tyndale New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 94.

clean or holy.”¹⁵³ Applying this definition of holiness becomes intrinsically linked to God’s divine nature, who is repeatedly described as “holy” in Scripture.¹⁵⁴ “For I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy” (Lev 11:44 NASB). Moseley observed that Moses highlighted the importance of God’s holiness and the believer’s manifestation of that holiness, indicating a prefiguration of their unity with Christ.¹⁵⁵

The Bible portrays the Christian life as sanctification in Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul describes sanctification as happening in two consecutive ways: definitive and progressive. First, believers are immediately set apart as holy in Jesus Christ. This is clearly stated in 1 Corinthians, “To the church of God, which is in Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor 1:2 NASB). David Prior notes that Paul emphasizes definitive sanctification by referring to it in the past tense: believers “have been sanctified.”¹⁵⁶ In addition, the author of Hebrews uses a similar verb tense in describing the immediate effect of sanctification and adds a definitive at the end, “By this will, we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all *time*” (Heb 10:10 NASB). The perfect obedience of Christ displays the complete fulfillment of God’s will, resulting in immediate sanctification.¹⁵⁷ Phillips argues that the “will of God” towards the end of this passage signifies a direct link between God’s holiness and a believer’s union with Christ.¹⁵⁸ As believers, they are no longer the same as before and are

¹⁵³ James Strong, *The New Strong’s Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2010), 244 (Hebrew 6942).

¹⁵⁴ Barrett, *40 Questions About Salvation*, 206.

¹⁵⁵ Allan Moseley, *Exalting Jesus in Leviticus* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 121, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁵⁶ David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 20–21.

¹⁵⁷ Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 207.

¹⁵⁸ Richard D. Phillips, *Hebrews: Reformed Expository Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006), 341.

distinct from the rest of the world.¹⁵⁹ Being united with Christ implies they are holy because Christ has earned God's favor through His perfect obedience during His lifetime.¹⁶⁰

Second, definitive sanctification prepares the way for progressive sanctification. Phillips notes that the notion of spiritual transformation is arguably the most expressive term employed in the New Testament to indicate the progress toward conformity with the image of Christ.¹⁶¹ “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:2 NASB). Moo emphasizes in his commentary on Romans that in chapter twelve, Paul encourages believers to remember where they belong.¹⁶² In his critique, he contends that spiritual growth based on performance should be avoided. Instead, he advocates for believers to embody the principles of the new age Christ established through the transformative power of the Spirit, thereby reshaping their deepest thoughts and attitudes.¹⁶³ Paul issues a more defined argument in 2 Corinthians, “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18). Kruse explains that the nature of Paul's text emphasizes the process of progressive sanctification.¹⁶⁴ Noting that this gradual transformation takes place over time rather than happening instantaneously.¹⁶⁵ The verb to indicate this change is in the present tense, suggesting

¹⁵⁹ Phillips, *Hebrews*, 342.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Henry, *Basics of the Faith*, 176.

¹⁶² Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 396.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Colin G. Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, vol. VIII, Tyndale New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 136.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

it is a continuous process.¹⁶⁶ The phrase “glory to glory” underscores the progression of this transformation, which is best interpreted as advancing through a believer’s contemplation of the glory of God rather than their imitation of it.¹⁶⁷

Theology of Anxiety

In Matthew 6:25 (NASB), Jesus provides a simple remedy for the stress experienced by Christians in their daily lives: “Do not worry.” In this section of Christ’s Sermon on the Mount, the futile preoccupation of humanity with material needs serves as an illustration of the underlying principle of spiritual development: God’s providence. This principle is crucial to understanding the dynamics of spiritual growth and should not be disregarded. Sproul notes that when the church speaks of God’s providence, the church is essentially speaking of God’s sovereignty, as He governs the entire universe.¹⁶⁸ He asserts that the term providence should be interpreted to encompass all requirements, both material and spiritual needs, and that God, in addition to having foreknowledge and meeting the needs of believers, also ensures provisions for the future.¹⁶⁹ In light of the overarching story depicted in the scriptures, it is evident that all forms of anxiety, whether spiritual or physical, can be traced back to a crisis of faith, as highlighted in Matthew 6:30, “. . . You of little faith!” (NASB).

¹⁶⁶ Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 136.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ R. C. Sproul, *Matthew: An Expositional Commentary* (Stanford, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2019), 156.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

In Philippians 2, Paul tackles the crisis of faith by delving into the practical aspects of everyday life. Dennis Johnson characterizes this approach as a shift from the transcendent experience of Christ's nature and actions to providing practical guidance for Christian living.¹⁷⁰

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to desire and to work for *His* good pleasure. (Phil 2:12–13 NASB)

Johnson characterizes Paul's explanation of the dynamics of Christian obedience using the imperative mood to illustrate the intricate relationship between divine initiation and empowerment on one hand and human involvement on the other.¹⁷¹ Martin argues that this passage expresses Paul's encouragement to the Philippians to exemplify their obedience to Christ, not by adhering to a rigid set of regulations but by wholeheartedly relying on Christ for their deliverance.¹⁷² In his analysis, Gordon Fee points out that Paul's address in Philippians 2:12–13 builds on an earlier argument from 1:27–2:4, highlighting the emphasis of faith in Christ for the effects of salvation rather than on individual works.¹⁷³ The essence of Fee's comment is that working out one's salvation involves the practical manifestation of personal and collective salvation for the benefit of others and not the individual.¹⁷⁴ Again, Fee argues the "God-in-me" principle of sanctification using Paul's admonition to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil 2:12 NASB). In his analysis, Fee points out that by phrasing it this way, Paul is

¹⁷⁰ Dennis E. Johnson, *Reformed Expository Commentary: Philippians* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 153.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹⁷² Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians*, vol. XI, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 119.

¹⁷³ Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 104.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.

drawing attention to God’s sole initiative within the believer.¹⁷⁵ He emphasizes that believers are called to actively participate in their spiritual development while acknowledging that God’s empowering presence is at work within and among them.¹⁷⁶ It is crucial to note that Paul is not suggesting that God is doing everything for them but rather providing the necessary strength for their efforts.¹⁷⁷ Still, the believer is often caught in a dilemma that leads to anxiety. Is the Christian life about passive trust in God’s work, active obedience to Christ, or a combination of both?¹⁷⁸ Ortlund suggests that the conflation of God’s sovereignty and human responsibility contributes to the gradual onset of anxiety in a believer’s sanctification by reinstating self-imposed barriers in their relationship with God.¹⁷⁹

The apostle Paul struggled with similar anxiety about spiritual growth, as he expressed in his Epistle to the Romans: “For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I *would* like to *do*, but I am doing the very thing I hate” (Rom 7:15 NASB). Sproul emphasizes that Scripture contains no stronger opposition to using performance-based metrics to measure a believer’s sanctification.¹⁸⁰ John Stott argues that Paul is not referring to his life before Christ or imitating the thoughts of an unregenerate person.¹⁸¹ Instead, Paul writes as a regenerated, mature believer struggling with sin and spiritual growth.¹⁸² Sproul builds upon Stott’s standpoint by asserting that while all believers aspire to lead a life of complete obedience

¹⁷⁵ Fee, *Philippians*, 105.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ John MacArthur, *Philippians*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2001), 151–52.

¹⁷⁹ Ortlund, *Deeper: Real Change*, 97.

¹⁸⁰ R. C. Sproul, *Romans: An Expository Commentary* (Sanford, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2019), 200.

¹⁸¹ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 206.

¹⁸² Ibid.

to Christ, they cannot do so due to the internal struggle between their overarching desire for obedience and the individual instances of obedience they encounter.¹⁸³ Sproul comments further on Romans 7:15 with an eye on spiritual growth anxiety. He notes that in the process of progressive sanctification, there is a risk for Christians to set their accomplishments as the standard for evaluating their spiritual growth and that of all other Christians in addition to the finished work of Christ.¹⁸⁴ This is commonly expressed in Scripture as a conflation of the law and the gospel.

Walther passionately expressed the words of Martin Luther, “The man who possesses the skill of distinguishing law and Gospel is foremost among his peers and should be regarded as a doctor of the Holy Writ.”¹⁸⁵ Colquhoun echoed Luther’s statement that understanding the distinction between the law and the gospel is not just a theoretical exercise but a practical necessity for every Christian’s faith, sanctification, and comfort.¹⁸⁶ The law instructs believers on how to conduct themselves before God but does not empower them to do so (Luke 10:27–28 NASB). In addition, the law always accuses the believers of their guilt in sin (Rom 2:14–15) and their inability to sanctify themselves through their performance. In contrast, the gospel provides the means to be right before God, namely by God’s grace alone through a union with Christ, the imputation of His righteousness, and the sanctification of His Spirit (1 Cor 1:30). It also ensures that the work required for a believer’s sanctification has already been completed in Christ (2 Cor 5:21). Stephen Nichols interprets Martin Luther’s perspective on spiritual development,

¹⁸³ Sproul, *Romans*, 204.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 206.

¹⁸⁵ C.F.W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel: American Lutheran Classic Vol. VII* (Brighton, IA: Just & Sinner, 2014), 22.

¹⁸⁶ John Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2022), 141

emphasizing that believers are not inactive, but rather that their sanctification does not result from their own efforts; rather, their sanctification gives rise to their performance.¹⁸⁷ Although the law does produce contrition of the conscious in sin, it offers no comfort to the sinner anxious about their spiritual growth (Rom 7:7–9). However, the gospel serves as a believer’s method for addressing spiritual growth anxiety. It calls believers to receive and accept rich gifts, precisely justification and sanctification. Walther uses the metaphor of a believer holding a carrying sack to demonstrate the difference between law and gospel.¹⁸⁸ The gospel demands nothing and only encourages believers to keep the sack open to receive the blessings of sanctification and spiritual growth.¹⁸⁹ Conversely, the law only takes from the sack, giving nothing in return and demanding more each time.¹⁹⁰ Gundry notes that keeping the law is regarded as the benchmark for flawless righteousness in the reformed view of sanctification.¹⁹¹ Nonetheless, this does not suggest complete sinlessness but rather faultlessness in the Hebraic meaning.¹⁹² Gundry’s point is that perfect righteousness involves complete dedication to serving God with honesty and integrity while striving to understand fully, implement, and adhere to the entire law, all within the framework of God’s grace.¹⁹³ Nichols noted that Martin Luther taught this concept as Christ’s fulfillment of the law, which became the instrument of spiritual growth.¹⁹⁴ He added a quote

¹⁸⁷ Stephen J. Nichols, *Beyond the Ninety-Five Theses: Martin Luther’s Life, Thought, and Lasting Legacy* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2016), 50, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁸⁸ C. F. W. Walther, *Law & Gospel: How to Read and Apply the Bible* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2010), 23.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Gundry, *Five Views on the Law*, 53–55.

¹⁹² Ibid., 55.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Nichols, *Beyond the Ninety-Five*, 51.

from Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, "The law says do this, and it is never done, while Grace says believe in this, and everything is done already."¹⁹⁵

The conflation of the law and gospel was a concern of the apostle Paul which he reflected in his Epistle to the Galatians. Paul expresses his utter amazement that the Galatians have been adding the practice of Jewish law to the gospel of Christ. "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel, which is not *just* another *account*; but there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ" (Gal 1:6–7 NASB). In his analysis, Ryken characterizes Paul's reaction as "Gob Smacked," signifying an extreme level of astonishment that leads to the individual placing their hand over their mouth in amazement.¹⁹⁶ He adds that the Galatian Christians were facing confusion induced by external sources (v. 7). These sources were using Jewish law to sow anxiety among the Galatians, persuading them that they needed to perform physical rituals in addition to the work of Christ to achieve sanctification.¹⁹⁷ Sproul's commentary aligns with Ryken's observation, highlighting the rarity of pastors who can accurately articulate the definition of the gospel without relying on the conjunction "and," with typically fewer than one in ten meeting this criterion.¹⁹⁸ Sproul points out that the conflation of law and the gospel has been influenced by misunderstandings and concerns about sanctification arising from misrepresenting the gospel.¹⁹⁹ John Stott holds a comparable stance regarding the pressure and bewilderment faced by the Galatian Christians due to the influence of certain individuals

¹⁹⁵ Nichols, *Beyond the Ninety-Five*, 51.

¹⁹⁶ Philip Graham Ryken, *Reformed Expository Commentary: Galatians* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2005), 16.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁹⁸ R. C. Sproul, *Galatians: An Expositional Commentary* (Sanford, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2022), 12.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

advocating for the inclusion of human effort alongside Christ's work for spiritual progress.²⁰⁰ He also highlights the similarity in Luke's language in Acts when addressing an issue before the Jerusalem Council: "Since we have heard that some of our number, to whom we gave no instruction, have unsettled you with their teachings, claiming that you must be circumcised and keep the law" (Acts 15:24 NASB).²⁰¹ Stott emphasized the increasing confusion and anxiety among Christians arising from the merging of Jewish law and the gospel of Christ.²⁰² This issue of sanctification was not only addressed in Paul's letter to the Galatians but was also prevalent in the early church.²⁰³ Its relevance continues to hold true today.²⁰⁴

Theology of "God-In-Me"

Dane Ortlund's God-in-me principle of sanctification is synonymous with the apostle Paul's declaration of a believer's union with Christ.²⁰⁵ One of the most basic biblical verses of a believer's union with Christ comes from Paul, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (2 Cor 5:17 NASB). According to Kruse, being in Christ implies being in a state of belonging to Him through the means of faith and being united with Him through the indwelling of the Spirit.²⁰⁶ A similar passage can be found in Ephesians 1, "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, just as He

²⁰⁰ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1968), 22.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ Ortlund, *Deeper: Real Change*, 54.

²⁰⁶ Kruse, *Second Corinthians*, 168.

chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him” (Eph 1:3–4 NASB). Ian Hamilton notes that Paul’s use of the term “in Christ” emphasizes a faith that is a believer’s “passport into Christ and into all the blessings that are found in Him.”²⁰⁷ It is through the God-in-me principle of sanctification that a believer is given a new identity and a new destiny.²⁰⁸

Although a believer’s union with Christ is a mystery, it is still essential to understand its nature. So, what does this union entail? Paul writes in 2 Corinthians that this union is judicial, “He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor 5:21 NASB). Kruse’s perspective suggests that the atoning work of Christ was not limited to being a sin offering but also encompassed the bearing of the consequences of sin and the imputation of righteousness.²⁰⁹ This passage delves into the crucial element of one’s connection with Christ in relation to addressing anxiety about spiritual development. A person’s sanctification is a consequence of Christ’s actions rather than their efforts. Upon believing in Christ, individuals enter into a distinct and united relationship with Him. Erikson likens this to forming a corporation, where the two entities are legally considered as one.²¹⁰ Essentially, through a union with Christ, the believer is lawfully righteous before God and consequently sanctified. However, a believer’s union with Christ carries specific implications. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans specifies the legal emphasis, “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1 NASB). Stott notes that “no

²⁰⁷ Ian Hamilton, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), 22, ProQuest Ebook Central.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Kruse, *Second Corinthians*, 173.

²¹⁰ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* 3rd Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2013), 881.

condemnation” is the equivalent of justification.²¹¹ Thus, a believer’s justification is based on the solid foundation of what God has accomplished through Jesus Christ.²¹²

Union with Christ is covenantal. As O. Palmer Robertson explains in his book *The Christ of the Covenants*, the way a covenant is administered remains the same, regardless of its unique substance.²¹³ A covenant is a bond sealed in blood that is under sovereign administration.²¹⁴ Jesus emphasizes the characteristic seal of blood during His final Passover with His disciples, “And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave *it* to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins” (Matt 26:27–28 NASB). According to Sproul, the actions of Jesus can be seen as both an establishment and fulfillment of the covenant relationship between God and His people.²¹⁵ While the former perspective suggests a continuation of the Old Testament tradition, the latter emphasizes the completion of the old covenant, paving the way for a new, complete covenant relationship with God in Jesus Christ.²¹⁶ In addition, covenants are given in perpetuity as noted in the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 17:7). Paul emphasizes that all the covenants established by God in the Old Testament are irrevocable and find their fulfillment in Christ, including their union with Him sealed by the Spirit.

For as many as the promises of God are, in Him they are yes; therefore, through Him also is our Amen to the glory of God through us. Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, who also sealed us and gave *us* the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge. (2 Cor 1:20–22 NASB)

²¹¹ Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 217.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1980), 15.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ R. C. Sproul, *Matthew: An Expository Commentary* (Stanford, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2019), 701.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

A believer's union with Christ is also a spiritual union. Paul addresses this spiritual union in 1 Corinthians and Romans. In 1 Corinthians, "For by one Spirit, we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor 12:13 NASB). According to Prior's argument, the context in which the term 'baptized' is used implies a state of being overwhelmed.²¹⁷ This state of being overwhelmed is associated with the presence of the Spirit within the believer and the believer being in Christ.²¹⁸ In his Epistle to the Romans, Paul highlights the interchangeable roles of Christ and the Holy Spirit in the context of salvation and sanctification.

However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. (Rom 8:9–12 NASB)

John Stott emphasizes that the hallmark of the believer is the indwelling of the Spirit of God (9), also referred to as the Spirit of Christ (10).²¹⁹ Thus, believers must also have the Spirit of Christ in them to belong to Christ.²²⁰ Believers are sealed by the Spirit as a fulfillment of Christ's promise (Eph 1:13–14), expressed in covenantal language by Paul. The indwelling of the Spirit is a direct result of a believer's covenantal union with Christ and serves as the means to spiritual growth through the efficacy of salvation. Without union with Christ, evidenced by His Spirit's presence, a believer cannot experience spiritual growth (John 15:5). This highlights the

²¹⁷ David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians: Life in the Local Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 211.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 224.

²²⁰ Ibid.

contrast between a believer's union with Christ and performance-based sanctification, leading to a reduction in anxiety related to spiritual growth.

The final characteristic of a believer's union with Christ is that it is essential for definitive and progressive sanctification. "Therefore, we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed daily" (2 Cor 4:16 NASB). John emphasizes the essential nature of a believer's union in Christ, "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, neither *can* you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:4–5 NASB). Strong characterizes "abide" or *meno* as a place to dwell continuously.²²¹ The focal point is intentionally nurturing every Christian's spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ.²²²

Theoretical Foundations

Within this section, the researcher will examine the theoretical underpinnings of how a believer's covenantal connection with Christ addresses the anxiety often experienced during spiritual growth. The researcher will explore various theories of sanctification that have influenced the Christian doctrine, practices addressing spiritual growth and its associated anxiety, and a practical contribution in application. Attention will be directed toward investigating the notion of sanctification within the framework of divine holiness and its relationship to the economy of spiritual growth in the Christian life, which is integral to God's divine design.²²³

²²¹ Strong, *The New Strong's Expanded Exhaustive*, 160 (Greek 3306).

²²² Gordon J. Keddie, *A Study Commentary on John*, vol. II (Darlington, UK: Evangelical Press, 2001), 156.

²²³ Allen, *Sanctification*, 21.

After conducting a thorough analysis of relevant literature, it has come to light that anxiety is a common occurrence during spiritual development. The extent of anxiety experienced by individuals is influenced by their understanding of God's nature, their comprehension of humanity's nature, and their ability to apply how Christ reconciles these two concepts. This process, commonly referred to as sanctification or spiritual growth, has been extensively studied in terms of its concepts, theology, and theory. While there are various practical strategies to facilitate personal growth during spiritual development, there is a lack of practical techniques that specifically address anxiety in a believer's union with Christ. This inadequacy underscores the need for a more comprehensive approach to spiritual growth that combines a believer's relationship with Christ with practical tools to manage anxiety.

Models of Sanctification

The program's curriculum centers around a reformed theology of sanctification and provides a thorough structure for exploring this topic, encouraging analytical thought and introspection. However, it is essential to note that there are diverse interpretations and uses of sanctification depending on one's theological convictions and background, which may differ considerably in certain aspects.²²⁴ Nonetheless, these variances all stem from a shared Evangelical outlook that recognizes the Bible as the ultimate authority and considers a renewed connection with God through faith in Christ as a person's most crucial necessity and delight.²²⁵

²²⁴ Melvin E. Dieter, Anthony A. Hoekema, Stanley M. Horton, Roberson J. McQuilkin, and John F. Walvoord, *Five Views on Sanctification* (Grand Rapids, MI: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 1996), 6, ProQuest Ebook Central.

²²⁵ Ibid.

Wesleyan Paradigm: John Wesley and George Whitefield introduced the Wesleyan model of sanctification in the 18th century.²²⁶ This model is steeped in Arminian theology, formed the Methodist tradition, and later inspired the Holiness and Pentecostal movements.²²⁷ Sanctification in the Wesleyan model involves collaboration between believers and the grace of God, shaping them to be more like Jesus Christ.²²⁸ Believers who cooperate with grace and live in the Spirit will manifest internal holiness (perfectionism) in their outward actions through Wesleyan sanctification.²²⁹ Ortlund describes this method of sanctification as God plus me, in which the believer partners with God to attain spiritual growth.²³⁰ In this paradigm, Christians believe that they have the power of holiness through God's grace and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to rescue themselves from the sin that leads to spiritual death.²³¹

According to the researcher's findings, the Wesleyan sanctification model contradicts Scripture, specifically Romans 7. In this chapter, Paul describes his present spiritual condition as a Christian who embodies both sainthood and sinfulness instead of the Wesleyan interpretation, which views Romans 7 as an account of Paul's life before his faith in Christ.²³² This approach also adopts a cooperative arrangement concerning the relationship between God's sovereignty and human responsibility in sanctification, thereby reducing the work of Christ in atonement.

Higher Life Paradigm: This model, often called Keswick, is heavily influenced by Wesleyan theology and the Pentecostal idea of the baptism of the Spirit. Essentially, the Higher

²²⁶ Morgan, *Christian Theology*, 44.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Diane Leclerc, and Mark A. Maddix, eds. *Spiritual Formation: A Wesleyan Paradigm* (Kansas City, MO: The Foundry Publishing, 2011), 49, ProQuest Ebook Central.

²²⁹ Ibid., 50.

²³⁰ Ortlund, *Deeper: Real Change*, 54.

²³¹ Leclerc, *Spiritual Formation*, 52.

²³² Doriani, *Romans*, 227.

Life view of sanctification espouses primary turning points in the believer's life: justification and sanctification.²³³ The belief also stressed that anointing of the Spirit was necessary to assure salvation after conversion.²³⁴ D. L. Moody, an advocate of Higher Life theology, believed Christians should go through a spiritual crisis and be baptized in the Holy Spirit after conversion.

R. A. Torrey, an early member of the Pentecostal movement and superintendent of Moody Bible Institute, established the groundwork for regularly teaching the Higher Life doctrine.²³⁵ A five-day course in Keswick progressive teaching often accompanied Higher Life conventions. This teaching included the diagnosis of sin (day one), the cure through victorious living (day two), a crisis in consecration (day three), the filling of the Spirit (day four), and the mission of Christian service (day five).²³⁶ This view has been challenged because of its synergistic, two-tier approach to sanctification instead of the monergistic approach, which appears to have more significant support in Scripture (1 Cor 1: 29–31).²³⁷

Augustinian-Dispensational Paradigm: Augustine of Hippo initially developed this model in the fifth century AD and was later adopted by dispensational theologians, such as Cyrus Scofield, in the latter part of the 19th century.²³⁸ According to this sanctification model, after being saved, an individual's spiritual condition is divided into two distinct natures: a new one and an old one. The old nature is prone to sin, while the new nature tends towards righteousness.²³⁹ As a result, a tension arises between these two natures, which Paul refers to in

²³³ Andrew David Naselli, *No Quick Fix: Where Higher Life Theology Came From, What it is, and Why it is Harmful* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 19–20, ProQuest Ebook Central.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

²³⁸ Dieter, *Five Views on Sanctification*, 155.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

Romans 7:14–20. The Augustinian-Dispensational perspective asserts that leading a holy life depends entirely on God’s grace plus nothing.²⁴⁰ Although believers are transformed into new creations through Christ, they do not inherently experience sanctification while alive.²⁴¹ This transformation occurs through spiritual rebirth, as Christ taught Nicodemus in John 3. This theory is similar to the Reformed model, except for differences in interpreting the Holy Spirit’s baptism and distinctions between the economies of law and grace.²⁴²

Reformed Paradigm: This model of sanctification arose from the Reformation (16th century) as a direct result of Martin Luther’s protest against the unbiblical practices of the Roman Catholic church.²⁴³ The fundamental teachings of this model are the authority of Scripture alone and justification by faith alone, which are expounded in the five *Solas* of the Reformation.²⁴⁴ The Reformed doctrine of sanctification holds that God’s divine handiwork alone brings about holiness in individuals, emphasizing a distinction between justification and sanctification, the justification being a shift in legal standing. In contrast, sanctification involves a profound internal and external transformation.²⁴⁵ Reformists view sanctification as a lifelong journey of repentance for Christians, resulting in progressive spiritual growth meant for the edification of others.²⁴⁶

The Westminster Shorter Catechism’s reformed dogma presents sanctification as a two-fold process that includes an initial act of God’s grace, followed by a progressive renewal of the

²⁴⁰ Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2007), 93, ProQuest Ebook Central.

²⁴¹ Dieter, *Five Views on Sanctification*, 155.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 156.

²⁴³ Morgan, *Christian Theology*, 497.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁵ Beeke, *Reformed Systematic Theology*, 602.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

believer's nature to conform to God's image.²⁴⁷ This signifies definitive and progressive sanctification, where believers gradually reduce sin and lead a righteous life to God's glory.²⁴⁸ The current model highlights that sanctification is a divine work of grace devoid of merit in the person sanctified and stems from God's unconditional election in Christ.²⁴⁹

This researcher will prioritize their focus on the Reformed and Augustinian-Dispensational views of sanctification while concurrently acknowledging and recognizing the validity of other models. Following the approach above, the BrandofMan Ministries' ten-week program, *Embracing Spiritual Growth*, aims to empower its members to engage in sanctification while in covenant union with Christ and living out that reality.

Embracing Spiritual Growth addresses the anxiety that often arises during sanctification through the believer's union with Christ and subsequent spiritual growth, as outlined in Romans 6:8–14. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of sealing this union with the Holy Spirit. The believer is sanctified not by a general union with Christ but through a covenantal union with Christ, which occurs once and for all time. The believer should also make participatory efforts in living out the reality of what Christ has done.

Addressing Spiritual Growth Anxiety

Dallas Willard's approach to spiritual growth involves three keywords: vision, intention, and means; and six principles of transformation: transforming the mind's thoughts, feelings, heart, body, social life, and soul.²⁵⁰ However, this approach relies heavily on human capabilities

²⁴⁷ Chad Van Dixhoorn, *Creeeds, Confessions & Catechisms: A Reader's Edition* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 418.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁹ Beeke, *Reformed Systematic Theology*, 604.

²⁵⁰ Dallas Willard, and Randy Frazee, *Renovation of the Heart for Students: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress Publishing Group, 2023), 78, ProQuest Ebook Central.

instead of a believer's union with Christ and the indwelling Spirit. Willard's program rests heavily on mysticism, lacks grounding in biblical doctrine, and puts the believer at risk of anxiety when instructions inevitably fail.

The Navigators organization provides diverse resources to assist individuals in augmenting their faith and aiding others in spiritual growth.²⁵¹ Although the Navigators do not offer a prescribed spiritual growth curriculum, they provide various helpful resources, including tools, studies, and teaching series that address topics related to spiritual growth and the anxiety that often accompanies sanctification. For example, the "Assurance of Salvation" Bible study series delves into the doubts that may arise among believers concerning the security of their salvation in Christ.²⁵² This series follows a monergistic, reformed theology of spiritual growth and has been instrumental in crafting the Embracing Spiritual Growth Bible study curriculum. Additionally, the Navigators Bible study series offers a valuable tool in the "How to Memorize Scripture" system, which presents four practical strategies for committing Bible verses to memory.²⁵³ These strategies will also be incorporated into the Embracing Spiritual Growth Curriculum. Navigators cover various categories, but not all are suitable to influence the Embracing Spiritual Growth curriculum. Some types may impose spiritual disciplines that could promote spiritual growth anxiety, so they will not be considered.

In his book *Kingdom Living*, Tony Evans delves into understanding God's plan for a believer's spiritual growth through a passionate and heartfelt relationship with Jesus Christ.²⁵⁴

²⁵¹ Navigators, <https://www.navigators.org/>, accessed February 1, 2024.

²⁵² Navigators, <https://www.navigators.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/navigators-assurance-salvation.pdf>, accessed February 26, 2024.

²⁵³ Navigators, <https://www.navigators.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/navigators-how-to-memorize-scripture.pdf>, accessed February 26, 2024.

²⁵⁴ Tony Evans, *Kingdom Living: The Essentials of Spiritual Growth* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2022), 13, ProQuest Ebook Central.

However, the abundantly popular teachings from Tony Evans are based on Arminian theology that posits a believer's sanctification is ultimately a synergistic act instead of monergistic. This theology of sanctification for Evans is evidenced early in his book, where he states, "When you receive Christ, everything becomes new at the core of your being, and it is this new life or new nature that gives you the disposition and the capacity to know and serve God and others rather than serving sin and self."²⁵⁵ In *Kingdom Living*, the idea of the believer being empowered to take action is reiterated. In this theory, the responsibility for using this power lies with the individual. Thus, Evans' theoretical model of spiritual growth may increase a believer's anxiety instead of reducing it.

Ligonier Ministries provides numerous teaching series and podcast presentations from a reformed perspective to provide valuable insights and knowledge to individuals seeking to enhance spiritual growth through their union with Christ. Specifically, Sinclair Ferguson's video teaching series, "Union with Christ," his podcast, "Sanctification Summarized," and Michael Reeves' video teaching series, "Reformation Truths," helped lay the foundations for recording sermons and presenting teaching session material.²⁵⁶

Theoretical Model

Christians need to develop and apply fundamental principles of faith. Thus, it is essential to have a clear and uncomplicated understanding of God's Word, free from intricate formulations and unfamiliar concepts.²⁵⁷ The researcher analyzed several relevant dissertations and thesis

²⁵⁵ Evans, *Kingdom Living*, 27.

²⁵⁶ Sinclair Ferguson, "Union with Christ," *Video*, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/series/union-with-christ>; Michael Reeves, "Reformation Truths," *Video*, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/series/reformation-truths>; Sinclair Ferguson, "Sanctification Summarized," *Podcast*, <https://www.ligonier.org/podcasts/things-unseen-with-sinclair-ferguson/sanctification-summarized>.

²⁵⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 37.

projects about the proposed project.²⁵⁸ As a result, one doctoral thesis has been given priority. The project was created by John Paul Jones, who designed a discipleship plan to help the Crossline Church members realize their true identity in Christ.²⁵⁹ This researcher discovered resemblances between the curriculum of the project and Embracing Spiritual Growth. In particular, Jones' eight-week program encouraged active participation through a series of sermons, a training module, a small group setting, and individual Bible study.²⁶⁰ According to Illeris Knud, this multi-layered approach proves more effective in promoting learning than a single-layered approach, such as one might experience in a sermon-based study.²⁶¹

To support Knud's theory, a 2019 study surveyed 1,123 churchgoers to determine the most effective ways for Christians to grow spiritually.²⁶² The research aimed to uncover the preferences of Christians regarding pathways to spiritual growth and identified several helpful methods for learning. The survey found that 88 percent of churchgoers found listening to sermons helpful in their spiritual growth.²⁶³ Furthermore, 74 percent stated that reading and

²⁵⁸Michelle Smith, "Recapturing John Wesley's Doctrine of Entire Sanctification: A Proposal for a Wesleyan-Pentecostal Doctrine of Entire Sanctification for Today," (PhD diss., Regent University, 2023), ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/recapturing-john-wesleys-doctrine-entire/docview/2810799713/se-2>; Ursual Nobuali Fikelepi, "Set Apart for God's Purposes: Guidelines for Contemporary Believers to Embrace and Apply the Sanctification of the Holy Spirit," (PhD diss., Regent University, 2023), ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/set-apart-god-s-purposes-guidelines-contemporary/docview/2806669866/se-2>.

²⁵⁹ John Paul Jones, "Becoming Who You Already Are in Christ: An Eight-Week Discipleship Plan to Equip Members of Crossline Church to Live Out Their Identity in Christ" (DMin thesis, Liberty University, John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, 2023), 8, Scholars Crossing.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 63–73.

²⁶¹ Knud, Illeris, ed., *Contemporary Theories of Learning: Learning Theorists ... in Their Own Words* (London: Routledge, 2008), 9, ProQuest Ebook Central.

²⁶² Leslie J. Francis, Simon, , David, W. Lankshear, and Ian Jones, "What Helps Christians Grow? An Exploratory Study Distinguishing among Four Distinctive Pathways," *Pastoral Psychology* 68, no. 4 (2019): 383–86 accessed March 15, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-019-00866-5>. Xx names

²⁶³ Ibid.

studying the Bible independently was beneficial, while 63 percent found teaching conferences helpful.²⁶⁴ The Embracing Spiritual Growth curriculum will include these three methods.

Due to the current logistical and geographical limitations of BrandofMan Ministries, this researcher proposed a ten-week curriculum titled Embracing Spiritual Growth, which deployed a podcast sermon, a group teaching series, and an individual Bible study to equip and empower members to know their covenant relationship with Christ, reduce spiritual growth anxiety, and to live out the God-in-me reality.

Moreover, this researcher will direct the focus away from the learning environment and onto the presentation using a learning model that satisfies the needs of every learning type.²⁶⁵ This researcher will incorporate the ‘4MAT’ learning style theory, a four-part learning model designed to address four areas of effective learning: engage, share, practice, and perform.²⁶⁶ Additionally, the researcher used Mark Maddix’s theory of the relationship between spiritual growth, Christian formation, and the *imago Dei* (see Appendix M) to prepare for the Embracing Spiritual Growth theoretical model.

Conclusion

Within the Christian community, it is not unusual for believers to feel spiritual growth anxiety when they lack a complete understanding of their relationship with Christ. Life’s obstacles can create roadblocks to spiritual development and lead to feelings of unease. Anxiety frequently arises from the perception that a believer’s connection to God is rooted in their performance. As a result, performance can become an idol, and the focus shifts away from God.

²⁶⁴ Francis, Simon, Foster, Lankshear, and Jones, “What Helps Christians Grow?”.

²⁶⁵ Jeanine, Blackwell, and Bernice McCarthy, *Hold On, You Lost Me: Use Learning Style to Create Training That Sticks* (La Vergne, TN: Association for Talen Development, 2023), 6, ProQuest Ebook Central.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

To address this anxiety, believers must embrace a personal bond with Christ via their union with Him. Rather than viewing Christ as an external means of salvation, He becomes a close partner through the God-promised union.

This literature review explores the spiritual inadequacy among adult members of BrandofMan Ministries and the anxiety it causes regarding their sanctification. The review draws on scholarly research, theological foundations, and theoretical methods and practices, focusing on spiritual growth, sanctification, and the covenant union between a believer and Christ. The objective is to provide a comprehensive understanding of this covenant union and assess the effectiveness of the Embracing Spiritual Growth intervention. The structure of this Intervention includes a podcast sermon series, a teaching series, and an individual Bible study series (see Appendices I, J, and K). The curriculum aims to convey biblical principles about a believer's covenant union with Christ and how to overcome spiritual growth anxiety. If BrandofMan Ministries implements Embracing Spiritual Growth, members will realize their covenant union with Christ, promoting confidence and reducing anxiety in sanctification.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The Embracing Spiritual Growth curriculum is not just a standalone program. It is a practical application of the human development theory, specifically Spiritual Formation and Christian Formation (see Appendix N). This theory, which inspired the curriculum methodology, is an essential program component. The curriculum follows a three-phase approach over ten weeks, with two weeks for introduction and conclusion (weeks one and ten). Participants will engage in eight pre-recorded podcast sermons, individual Bible studies, and teaching sessions executed concurrently each week (see Appendices K, L, and M). This program aims to help adult members understand and experience their union with Christ in a distinctly covenantal way and apply it daily to alleviate anxiety related to spiritual growth. The researcher will recruit ten to fifteen participants from BrandofMan Ministries and local churches to participate in the Embracing Spiritual Growth program. Furthermore, the researchers will account for an estimated ten percent dropout rate due to the ministry context.

Intervention Design

The intervention was crafted by the researcher to specifically target the anxiety associated with spiritual development within the framework of a believer's covenantal relationship with Christ. The methodology employed the 4MAT approach to accommodate various learning styles,

such as auditory/visual, social, private, and didactic preferences.¹ The 4MAT system utilizes a four-quadrant approach to tailor learning through self-discovery, discussion, coaching, and information.² The researcher devised a hybrid approach to the 4MAT system by introducing a three-step curriculum titled Embracing Spiritual Growth. This curriculum emphasized the amalgamation of self-discovery and coaching through podcast sermons, facilitated information sharing and discussion in teaching sessions, and the encouragement of self-discovery and information acquisition through individual Bible study series. The incorporation of the three distinct teaching methodologies, namely podcast sermon, teaching series, and individual Bible study (see Appendices K, L, and M), worked collectively to strengthen and solidify the same biblical truths regarding the covenantal union of a believer with Christ at every stage of the program.



Figure 3.1. Collective learning

¹ Jeanine, O'Neill-Blackwell, *Engage: The Trainer's Guide to Learning Styles* (Newark, NJ: Center for Creative Leadership, 2012), 38, ProQuest Ebook Central.

² Ibid.

First, as part of the Embracing Spiritual Growth intervention, the researcher developed a set of eight expository sermons (see Appendix L) to be delivered as podcasts over eight weeks. This format allowed participants to listen to the sermons at their convenience, using audio-only, and in a location of their choice. According to Dan Brownell, expository sermons are invaluable for communicating God’s teachings, applying the message through the Holy Spirit, and promoting a Christocentric worldview rather than solely addressing secular concerns.³ Chappel agrees and stresses the importance of expository preaching that goes beyond merely elucidating the original meaning of the biblical text.⁴ Instead, it demands a deeper exploration of what the text means in the present context and how it can inform and guide the lives of God’s people.⁵

This approach was preferred over the live delivery of sermons for three reasons. First, BrandofMan Ministries hosts weekly podcasts and group Bible studies but does not offer weekly sermons due to its ministry context. Second, pre-recording sermons as podcasts enabled greater participation for members with limited in-person availability due to work and other church-related activities. Last, if the researcher required participants to attend live sermons, it would have significantly reduced the number of participants.

Each pre-recorded sermon lasted approximately 30–40 minutes and introduced a weekly theme that systematically explained the curriculum’s purpose, application, and emphasis on addressing spiritual growth anxiety with the covenant union with Christ. Each sermon encouraged and promoted confidence, reduced anxiety in spiritual growth, encouraged contemplation through biblical truths, and coached on biblical principles through application.

³ Dan Brownell, “The Importance of Expository Preaching,” *Todayspastor.org*, March 29, 2018, accessed February 26, 2024, <https://todayspastor.org/importance-expository-preaching/>.

⁴ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 3rd Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2018), 69.

⁵ Ibid.

The sermon themes emphasized the principles covered in the teaching series and individual Bible study sessions each week, as shown in Figure 3.4. These sessions aimed to deepen participants' comprehension of their covenantal relationship with Christ and to address anxiety in the context of spiritual growth. The researcher published the sermons on the ministry website at <https://www.brandofman.org/>, which offered various formats for listening: iTunes, Spotify, and YouTube. This variety ensured that the participants could access the sermons easily.

The second part of the methodology was the teaching series (see Appendix K), which comprised eight in-depth didactic sessions. Todd Linn emphasizes the significance of expository teaching, explaining that biblical exposition entails obtaining the message from a particular passage in the Bible and then “exposing” the meaning of the text before applying it to contemporary life.⁶ The series will be taught in a structured environment through interactive lectures, PowerPoint presentations, and graphics. The venue will be the rectory at the Lookout Community Church, utilizing the pulpit, central media screen, and audio devices, and the library at the Faith Baptist church utilizing the researcher's lectern and laptop fed through HDMI to a 48-inch monitor. Participants will be encouraged to engage in personal observations and apply these to the subject at hand. This learning platform stressed the importance of the following points: the need to know, the readiness to learn, the role of experience, and practical application.⁷

Each session provided detailed exegesis and exposition of selected biblical texts in line with the weekly theme with the intention of increasing knowledge and stimulating discussion for addressing spiritual growth anxiety through a believer's union with Christ. The instructional

⁶ Todd Linn, “Introduction to Expository Preaching,” *Preachingtruth.org*, July 10, 2020, <https://preachingtruth.org/introduction-to-expository-preaching/> (Accessed February 26, 2024).

⁷ William Yount, *The Teaching Ministry of the Church: Second Edition* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008), 357, ProQuest Ebook Central.

sessions consisted of a fifty-minute lecture and a PowerPoint presentation. The researcher facilitated a fifteen-minute question-and-answer session at the close of each teaching session, allowing participants to ask questions, gain insights into relevant biblical materials, and offer active engagement using the Socratic method.⁸ The teaching methodology fostered critical thinking skills and enabled participants to comprehend and apply the basis of their beliefs, as prescribed in 1 Peter, "... but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, but with gentleness and respect" (1 Pet 3:15 NASB). Each participant was provided a folder containing writing paper, utensils, and highlighters for note-taking and record-keeping during the program at the researcher's expense.

As part of the Embracing Spiritual Growth curriculum, the third part of the methodology involves participating in an individual Bible study (see Appendix M). This study will direct the individual member to read the prescribed Scripture and respond in light of Psalm 1:2 to delight and meditate day and night in the Word of God. According to Jan Johnson, approaching an individual Bible study with the sole intention of completing it or with the expectation of experiencing a better day is likely to instill anxiety.⁹ Instead, believers should consider individual Bible study as a way of fostering a meaningful connection with God.¹⁰ To do so, the researcher emphasized that it is essential to take intermittent breaks to reflect and meditate upon His teachings.¹¹

⁸ R. C. Sproul, "The Socratic Method," *YouTube, Ligonier Ministry*, 2021, <https://www.ligonier.org/posts/socratic-method>.

⁹ Jan Johnson, *Study and Meditation*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 6, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

The individual Bible study uses the inductive method. This method involves observing a text in Scripture and then drawing conclusions based on those observations.¹² The inductive approach comprises three parts: observation, interpretation, and application.¹³ Each Bible study session will have five responsive questions that should be completed and returned at the next meeting and a verse for memorization. Donald Whitney emphasizes that nothing is more important to spiritual growth than God's Word for personal and intimate intake in the Christian life.¹⁴ Whitney's argument is supported by the theoretical concept of Embracing Spiritual Growth, which deploys a curriculum that takes a comprehensive and reformed approach to tackling the anxiety often accompanying spiritual growth.

Each week, participants received a Bible study outline (see Appendix M), which included a predetermined Scripture related to the weekly curriculum theme (fig. 3.4). Participants were expected to study the text at their own pace before the next meeting. The Bible study outline included five re-occurring responsive questions the participants completed in their own words and returned to the following week. In addition, the Bible study outlines listed a specific verse related to the weekly theme the participants were to memorize. The primary goal of memorizing verses was to enrich the experience of studying the Bible and to incorporate Scriptural references to tackle concerns related to spiritual growth anxiety. A summary of the TMS (Topical Memory System) collected from the Navigators website was issued to assist the participant with memorization. (see Appendix O).¹⁵ To assess the individual Bible study's efficacy, the

¹² Gregg Ogden, *Essential Guide to Becoming a Disciple: Eight Sessions for Mentoring and Discipleship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 10, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress Publishing Group, 2014), 24, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁵ Navigators, accessed February 26, 2024, <https://www.navigators.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/navigators-how-to-memorize-scripture.pdf>.

researcher gathered subjective, qualitative responses and conducted weekly data analysis, focusing on identifying keywords and phrases to uncover recurring themes. These themes were conceptualized and used to gain insights into the curriculum's ongoing and final effectiveness, guiding potential adjustments. The individual Bible study encouraged self-discovery through private meditation, interaction with specific texts, and enhanced biblical knowledge.

Intervention Model Overview

The researcher's implementation of the Embracing Spiritual Growth intervention model is a meticulous 14-step process that begins with the initiation of a daily journal and ends with the results and conclusions developed from the collection of qualitative and quantitative data.

Table 3.1. Intervention model

<i>Step Progress</i>	<i>Activity</i>
<i>One</i>	Execute project and initiate a daily journal.
<i>Two</i>	Finalize and record the project's sermons for upload to the podcast.
<i>Three</i>	Finalize the project's teaching sessions with PowerPoint presentations
<i>Four</i>	Finalize the project's individual Bible study outlines with verse memorizations.
<i>Five</i>	Finalize all surveys and questionnaires.
<i>Six</i>	Finalize all recruitment announcements.
<i>Seven</i>	Initiate site permission requests and approvals and evaluate logistical needs.
<i>Eight</i>	Initiate all recruitment.
<i>Nine</i>	Receive participation requests and distribute welcome letters with consent forms.
<i>Ten</i>	Hold an introductory meeting.

<i>Eleven</i>	Execute an eight-week Embracing Spiritual Growth intervention.
<i>Twelve</i>	Conduct a wrap-up meeting.
<i>Thirteen</i>	Analyze all qualitative and quantitative data.
<i>Fourteen</i>	Develop project results and conclusions.

The first step in the process is initiating and maintaining a journal. This journal serves as more than just a record of the project-related activities. It acts as a repository for any researcher's presuppositions concerning the curriculum, ensuring that the intervention approach remains unbiased. This is a crucial element in the quest to develop a reliable and valid method for measuring the intervention's efficacy.¹⁶

In steps two through six, the complete course curriculum will be fully developed and ready for implementation, consisting of podcast sermons, teaching sessions, and private Bible studies (see Appendices J, K, and L). All required surveys, questionnaires, interview questions, consent forms, recruitment materials, and permission forms (see Appendices A through M) will also be finalized.

The next step, step seven, involves sending permission requests to potential venue sites (see Appendix A) and providing permission confirmation forms for their convenience (see Appendix B). All logistical requirements will be addressed at this stage, including audiovisual equipment, lighting, tables, chairs, computers, and other necessary items.

Upon obtaining site permission, step eight involves initiating recruitment for the project, encompassing verbal and social media recruitment as detailed in Appendix C and Appendix E,

¹⁶ Stringer, Ernest T. and Alfredo Ortiz Aragon, *Action Research* 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2020), 143, Liberty University Online Bookshelf.

respectively. Qualified and interested participants will receive consent forms, as outlined in Appendices C and D.

Moving on to step nine, welcome letters (Attachment F) will be dispatched to all interested participants at least two weeks before the project's commencement. The welcome letters will contain attached consent forms (see Appendix D) and information on introductory meetings. Participants will be reminded to read, sign, and return the consent forms.

Step ten entails conducting the introductory session of the first week. During this session, signed consent forms will be collected (see Appendix D), and participants will be given pre-intervention surveys, questionnaires, and the first Bible study handout. Clear instructions will be provided on returning the surveys, questionnaires, and Bible study responses. The researcher will present an overview of the Embracing Spiritual Growth project, encompassing the identified ministry gap in addressing spiritual growth anxiety, project expectations, proposed weekly themes, expected outcomes, projected conclusion, and anticipated end date, and will also conduct a recorded pre-intervention group interview.

The Embracing Spiritual Growth project is an eight-week program, with step eleven focusing on execution. The researcher's responsibilities include uploading eight podcast sermons and making them accessible to participants via email, providing weekly teaching sessions with PowerPoint presentations, and distributing individual Bible study handouts (refer to Appendices J, K, and L). Additionally, the researcher will use a weekly Bible study responsive questionnaire to assess the intervention's effectiveness over the eight weeks.

Step twelve involves holding a final meeting to conclude the intervention. During this meeting, post-intervention surveys and questionnaires will be collected. A recorded post-

intervention group interview will be conducted, followed by an after-action question-and-answer session for participants to share their feedback on the project.

Steps thirteen and fourteen focus on data analysis and conclusions. Qualitative data from the questionnaires and interviews will be analyzed using the Thematic approach, and quantitative data from the surveys will be analyzed using the t-test analysis formula. The results will be documented in Chapter Four, and the project conclusions will be detailed in Chapter Five.

Participants

Through open recruitment, the intervention enrolled eighteen participants from BrandofMan Ministries and local churches. The aim was to gather a diverse group of adults (18 years and older) who were active members of the regional Christian community. The participants represented a broad spectrum of church members within BrandofMan Ministry, aged 30 to 80, including seven married couples and four singles (1 male and 3 females). Two participants withdrew during the intervention. Recruitment occurred verbally during church services at Lookout Community Church and Faith Bible Church and through social media channels associated with BrandofMan Ministries. Interested individuals received a welcome letter via email (refer to Appendix F), a consent form for participation (refer to Appendix D), and details of the introductory meeting.

Efficacy

The Embracing Spiritual Growth project examined how a participant's covenant union with Christ affected spiritual growth anxiety. Qualitative data was collected through pre-recorded interviews and questionnaires, and quantitative data was collected through surveys administered before and after implementing the curriculum. The questions were identical to ensure the

reliability of the results and minimize potential bias. The study’s objective was to assess variations in a participant’s comprehension and implementation of strategies for addressing spiritual growth anxiety through a covenant union with Christ before and after the intervention.

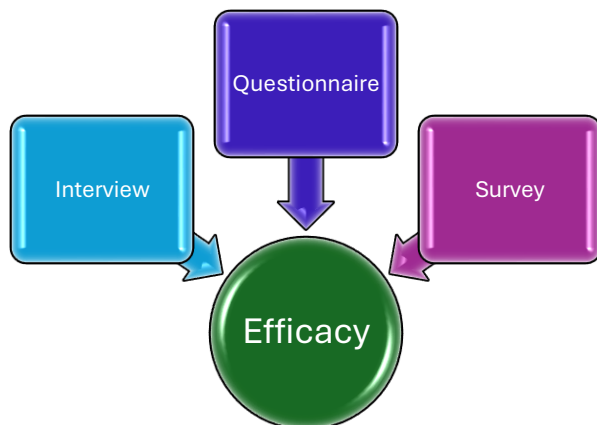


Figure 3.2. Triangulation of data

Qualitative Data

The researcher used two methodologies to collect qualitative data: Questionnaires and group interviews. Participants completed a written questionnaire before and after the project and weekly through individual Bible study (see Appendix H and J). The questionnaires posed thirteen open-ended questions to extrapolate participants’ knowledge and understanding of their union with Christ, spiritual growth, and related anxiety.¹⁷ The researcher kept the questions under twenty words and focused on keywords related to the thesis statement derived from the identified ministry gap, such as “covenant,” “union,” and “spiritual growth,” to facilitate coding.¹⁸ The researcher formulated inquiries based on six main categories: spiritual growth, God’s sovereignty, human responsibility, union in Christ, covenant, and the law and gospel.

¹⁷ Kate Bolton and Ian Brace, *Questionnaire Design: How to Plan, Structure and Write Survey Material for Effective Market Research* (London: Kogan Page, 2022), 149–51, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 149.

Within the spiritual growth category, two specific questions were included: the first aimed to capture the participant's overarching comprehension of spiritual growth, while the second sought to ascertain the methodology employed by participants to gauge their own progress. In the realm of divine sovereignty, the researcher examined participants' understanding of God's comprehensive authority over all things through Christ and the extent to which God influences a believer's spiritual advancement. In examining the dimension of human responsibility within spiritual development, the researcher presented a fundamental query: "What impact does an individual have on spiritual growth?" This targeted question aimed to elucidate the formation of anxiety within a believer's spiritual progression. In addition to the three existing categories, a fourth category was incorporated to gather data on the participants' perceptions of their relationship with Christ and its significance in the process of sanctification. In the fifth category of the assessment, participants were evaluated on their comprehension of the biblical concept of 'covenant' and its importance as a divine commitment to the followers of the faith. This category held significant weight in the qualitative data, as the Embracing Spiritual Growth curriculum was founded on the idea of believers' union with Christ being specifically covenantal.

The sixth and final category of the questionnaire is "The Law and the Gospel." The researcher utilized a conceptual framework to establish that the biblical differentiation between the law and the gospel has a significant impact on Christian thought, particularly in terms of practical versus positional righteousness in relation to God. The researcher developed questions within these categories to assess participants' comprehension and implementation of the gospel in spiritual development, the biblical concept of the law and its impact on spiritual growth, the interplay between the two concepts, and how this relationship affected their spiritual

development. The questionnaires used in the study were self-completion and take-home, so pre-coding was not done to allow participants to respond spontaneously.¹⁹

In addition to the questionnaire, group interviews were conducted before and after the project using short, open-ended, purpose-driven questions (see Appendix I).²⁰ The interviews provided in-depth insights into participants' understanding and application of addressing spiritual growth anxiety through a covenant union with Christ. The following chart is a summary breakdown of each of the ten questions presented in the group interview.

Table 3.2. Group interview question summary

Group Questions	Summary rationale	Data point
#1: Please describe the importance of spiritual growth.	This question was designed to engage in discussion on the group's understanding of spiritual growth.	The specific data point was an emphasis placed on the word, importance.
#2: What does it mean to grow spiritually?	The researcher's intention was to elicit multiple, subjective responses.	The phrase "What does it mean?" was used intentionally to encourage responses from personal experience.
#3: What is the purpose of the Christian life?	As all of these questions were framed by the backdrop of spiritual growth, this was directed as a spiritual growth worldview.	The word 'purpose' was used to influence responses based on the reason for the Christian life instead of a definition.
#4: How does the Bible describe something becoming holy ?	This strikes at the root of the project, how something is sanctified.	Something becoming holy implies it was not previously holy, such as ourselves.
#5: What does the Bible mean when it says believers are " in Christ " or "in the Lord?"	This question is meant to elicit the participant's	The significance of believers being described as those "in Christ" will

¹⁹ Bolton, Questionnaire Design: How to Plan, 63

²⁰ Ibid., 149–51.

	knowledge of their union with Christ.	be a teaching point midway into the project.
#6: Regarding spiritual growth, explain the relationship between God's actions and your actions.	The conceptual framework indicated one source of spiritual growth anxiety was the conflation of practical and positional righteousness.	A key point in this question is the word, relationship. This purpose is to distinguish between what God does and what we do in regard to spiritual growth.
#7: What is a biblical covenant?	This question was also posed in the questionnaire, but the researcher included it in the group interview to elicit a group exchange of thought.	The researcher emphasized 'biblical' to impart the significance of the thesis, which implies that God builds his redemptive work through covenants.
#8: Please describe why biblical covenants are essential in the life of a Christian.	The structure of this question was to create interest in the covenantal significance of spiritual growth.	The word, essential, was used to place emphasis on the purpose of covenant in Christianity above a simple definition.
#9: How do you understand the biblical concept that a Christian is a sinner and a saint simultaneously ?	This was meant for the believer to reflect on biblical teaching, specifically Romans 7. This question is addressed in week 6.	The data point encourages the thought that this concept is present in all believers at the same time and explains why that is.
#10: What has been the impact of sin on humanity?	The final question was meant to encourage thinking through this from a Christian worldview.	The intent of this question is to encourage the group to think about what has already happened, both negatively and positively.

The researcher chose in-person group interviews over online pre-recorded interviews with written responses to emphasize spontaneity and enable group interaction and discussion. The ministry context guaranteed that each group interview would involve fewer than fifteen participants at each location. To minimize unnecessary data recording and enhance the

anonymity of participants, the researcher made sure to inform the participants when the recording started and ended. The questions were then asked exactly as written. These interviews were recorded on a password-protected laptop hard drive and will be retained for three years before permanent deletion. To ensure anonymity, the researcher will transcribe the responses verbatim and categorize them for analysis in Chapter Four.

The researcher will screen and transcribe the qualitative data from the questionnaires and interviews using the Thematic Analysis Method.²¹ In thematic analysis, the researcher systematically evaluates the project's conceptual framework using a six-step process. In the first step, the researcher reviews written surveys and transcribes recorded interviews to familiarize themselves with the data and then selects quotes that effectively capture viewpoints and patterns relevant to the objectives of the Embracing Spiritual Growth project.²² In the second step, the researcher interprets keywords and phrases through reoccurring patterns and terms.²³ The significance of the keywords is that they encapsulate a participant's knowledge and perception directly derived from the data.²⁴ The third step involves assigning short phrases or words to data segments that capture the data's core message.²⁵ This step is meant to simplify the textual data into theoretical form to help identify elements related to the project thesis.²⁶ Step four involves theme development. The codes are organized into meaningful groups to identify patterns to

²¹ Marco J. Haenssger, *Interdisciplinary Qualitative Research in Global Development: A Concise Guide* (Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2019), 71–74, ProQuest Ebook Central.

²² Muhammad Naeem, Wilson Ozuem, Kerry Howell, and Silvia Ranfagni, "A Step-by-Step Process of Thematic Analysis to Develop a Conceptual Model in Qualitative Research," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* no. 22 (2023): 2, accessed June 11, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231205789>.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 2–3.

²⁵ Ibid., 3.

²⁶ Ibid., 4.

transition from an analysis of codes and categories to a more abstract interpretation by creating themes that go beyond recurring elements and link them to the questions and data.²⁷ Step five is conceptualization, which involves understanding the concepts emerging from the data. The quality of this data is assessed on clarity, accuracy, reliability, applicability, and their contribution to the Embracing Spiritual Growth project.²⁸ Step Six is the final step in the thematic analysis. In this step, the researcher develops a conceptual model. This process involves creating a representation of the data, which encapsulates all the findings and insights derived from the data.²⁹ In addition to qualitative data, quantitative data is also collected.



Figure 3.3. Efficacy of qualitative data

Quantitative Data

The researcher conducted a pre- and post-project survey to gather quantifiable data on various factors (refer to Appendix G). The survey comprised twenty-six closed-ended

²⁷ Naeem, Ozuem, Howell, and Ranfagni, “A Step-by-Step Process.”

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

statements, organized into four categories: God and Humans, Christ and Spirit, Union with Christ, and Spiritual Growth. The category “God and Humans” included six statements focused on capturing data on God’s sovereignty, His holiness, the spiritual condition of humanity, and the biblical standards for righteousness. The “Christ and Spirit” category utilized seven statements to collect data on the work of the Holy Spirit, His relationship with believers, and the work of Christ in relation to a believer’s spiritual growth. The “Union with Christ” category comprised six statements to collect data on the type and manner of Christ’s relationship with believers concerning spiritual growth. Lastly, the “Spiritual Growth” category used a combination of seven statements to elicit data on the meaning and purpose of spiritual growth and the relationship between God’s actions and human actions in sanctification.

The researcher limited participant responses to the statements by providing five predetermined options. The survey utilized the Likert scale, which consists of five options and assigns them numerical values from 1 to 5: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree to measure responses to the statements.³⁰ The survey’s sample size was determined based on the required statistical significance for the findings, considering the constraints of available resources in a rural community, as previously noted in the ministry context.³¹ Thus, the accumulated data will be analyzed using the t-test analytics formula.³² The statistical hypothesis being tested is a paired t-test with a one-tailed significance

³⁰ Britannica, “Likert Scale,” <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Likert-Scale>.

³¹ Helen Gavin, *Understanding Research Methods and Statistics in Psychology* (London: SAGE Publications, 2008), 148, Pro Quest Ebook Central.

³² Jerry Brown, “What is a T-Test,” Liberty University Video, December 10, 2018, 11:20, https://canvas.liberty.edu/courses/508741/pages/watch-what-is-a-t-test?module_item_id=59080957.

level.³³ The rationale behind a paired sample is to determine whether the change in means between two data points using the same participants (pre- and post-intervention survey) is statistically significant.³⁴ The researcher employed a t-test to determine if there is a substantial difference in the data rather than a chance of happening. A peak value or probability level of less than 0.05 in the mean difference between two data points will denote statistical significance in the data.³⁵ The t-test formula was selected over other formulas using averages, simple means, differences, and summations to analyze predetermined data points of paired participants effectively. The data collected in the pre- and post-intervention survey was intended to complement the subjective data collected through interviews and questionnaires.

Intervention Implementation

Week One

During the introductory sessions held at LCC on Tuesday, April 9, from 6–7 p.m. and at FBC on Thursday, April 11, from 6–7 p.m., the researcher collected all signed consent forms from the participants. Twelve participants were present at LCC, and six were at FBC. Additionally, the researcher outlined the course curriculum design, which consisted of three weekly events: an expository sermon delivered as a podcast, a teaching session, and individual Bible study. In addition to this, the researcher also addressed any technical or logistical issues raised by the participants, primarily related to missing sessions or difficulties in accessing the podcast. Furthermore, the researcher outlined the objectives of the expository sermons, teaching

³³ Prabhaker Mishra, Uttam Singh, Chandra M Pandey, Priyandarshni Mishra, and Gaurav Pandey, “Application of Student’s t-test, Analysis of Variance, and Covariance,” *Annals of Cardiac Anesthesia*, no. 4 (2022): 408, accessed June 12, 2024, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6813708/pdf/ACA-22-407.pdf>.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 409.

³⁵ Brown, “What is a T-Test.”

sessions, and individual Bible studies structured around eight themes: Do Not Fear, Biblical Footings, Covenant Foundations, Union, God-In-You, The Work of One, Do vs. Done, and Rest. Each session built upon the previous one, reinforcing the biblical theme of combatting spiritual growth anxiety through a covenant union with Christ.

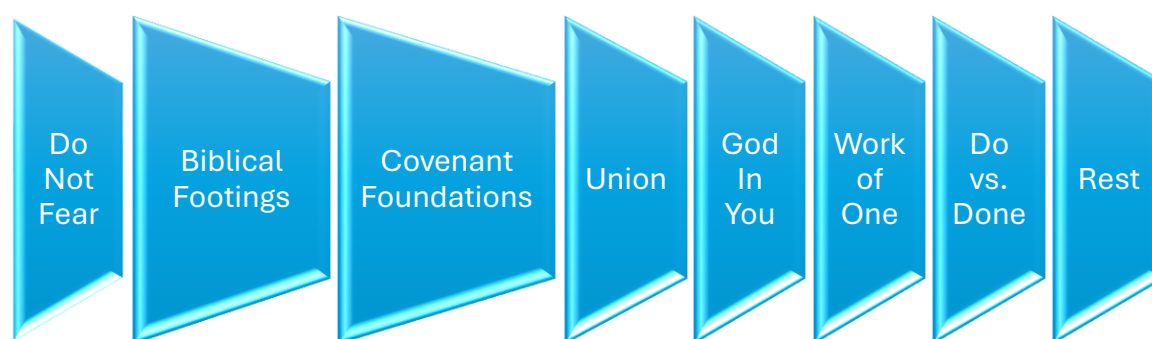


Figure 3.4. Sermon themes

The participants were informed that they would receive a link to access the weekly podcast sermon via email or text, based on their preference, starting April 12 at around 10 a.m. The initial sermon (see Appendix L) focused on the “Do Not Fear” theme in spiritual growth anxiety, providing a detailed analysis of its causes and relevant biblical teachings, emphasizing Matthew 6:24–34. Additionally, all participants were provided with a binder and writing materials to assist in organizing and retaining handouts, notes, and program outlines.

Before the project officially began, the researcher distributed a pre-project survey and questionnaire (see Appendices G and H) with instructions for participants to fill them out at home. Participants were encouraged to express their genuine thoughts and opinions without being influenced by external sources. These were to be submitted during the second week’s teaching session.

Furthermore, the participants received the first of eight individual Bible study outlines, which covered Hebrews 10:1–10, along with responsive questions and verse memorization (see

Appendices M and O). They were encouraged to engage with the material and respond to the questions independently.

The researcher also organized a question and answer session to address any concerns or confusion about the program, although no questions were raised. The remaining 30 minutes were utilized to conduct and document a pre-intervention group interview to evaluate the participants' subjective comprehension of their covenant union with Christ and spiritual development (see Appendix I).

Week Two

The Tuesday meeting recorded two participants dropping from the program at the LCC location, bringing the total at LCC to ten. The researcher collected the completed Bible study questions distributed during week one, and participants were reminded that the podcast sermons and individual Bible studies would continue one week before the teaching session (see Appendix M).

The first sermon of the curriculum delved into the theme of spiritual growth anxiety, focusing on "Do Not Fear." From a biblical perspective, the sermon provided an in-depth analysis of the underlying causes of spiritual growth anxiety and offered solutions, particularly Matthew 6:24–24. The researcher led the initial session, the first of eight (refer to Appendix K), building on the previous week's podcast sermon and individual Bible study materials (refer to Appendices L and M). The session involved an explanation of Hebrews 5:11–6:12, explicitly addressing the anxiety associated with spiritual growth and its related challenges. The Hebrews 5–6 text delivers a cautionary message that has historically caused significant distress among Christians. The duration was approximately forty-five minutes, concluding with a fifteen-minute question and answer session, completing the first project theme, "Do Not Fear." Participants

were then provided the individual Bible study outline covering Romans 3:10–18 for the upcoming week (see Appendix K) with a verse memorization of Romans 3:11.

Week Three

The researcher collected the completed Bible study questions distributed during week two. The sermon delved into God’s holiness and sovereignty, the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit’s transformative power, and humanity’s fallen nature (see Appendix L) with selected text from Romans 3–5, 1 John 1, John 14, and Luke 24. It aimed to instill confidence and alleviate anxiety in sanctification. The teaching series expanded on the theme of Biblical Footings (see Appendix K). It emphasized the fundamental importance of various aspects of a believer’s union with Christ, such as God’s sovereignty and holiness, the incarnation, the power of the Holy Spirit, and humanity’s fallen state. These are essential for laying the groundwork for addressing the anxiety that a believer may experience during sanctification. The teaching series provided an exegetical and expository review of selected text from Leviticus 19:2, 1 John 1:1–4, 1 Samuel 16:13, Acts 5:3–4, Genesis 1:1–2, John 14:16–17, and Romans 7:21–23 (see Appendix K), lasting approximately 50 minutes. A question and answer was held, completing the theme of Biblical Footings.

The Bible study outline for the upcoming week was distributed. It included the text from Hebrews 8:1- 13 (see Appendix M). The verse to memorize was Mark 14:24.

Week Four

The researcher collected the completed Bible study questions distributed during week three. The podcast sermon delved into the significance of God’s covenant in Genesis 15 (refer to Appendix J). Specifically, the importance of God’s covenant is substantiated in Genesis 15:1–5,

is upheld in Genesis 15:6, and is affirmed in Genesis 15:7–18 (refer to Appendix L). The teaching series concluded the “Covenant Foundations” theme with an in-depth analysis and explanation of Hebrews 9:11–22, emphasizing Christ as the new covenant mediator (refer to Appendix K). The teaching session lasted around 45 minutes, providing a fifteen-minute question and answer session, thus completing the “Covenant Foundations” theme. The researcher distributed the Bible study outline for week five, which focuses on Romans 6:8–11 and emphasizes God’s primary role in the spiritual growth of believers. The verse to memorize for week five is 2 Corinthians 5:17 (refer to Appendix M).

Week Five

The researcher gathered the completed Bible study questions from week four, with the podcast sermon delving into an exposition of Ephesians 1:1–14. The sermon emphasized the covenant union between a believer and Christ as a central principle of the Christian faith, an overlooked aspect (see Appendix L). The teaching session explained Ephesians 1:1–14, exploring how the four main views of sanctification influence a believer’s union with Christ: “God then me,” “God not me,” “God plus me,” and “God in me.” The session lasted approximately 50 minutes, followed by a ten-minute open forum for questions and answers concerning Ephesians 1:1–14, thus concluding the project theme “Union.” The researcher distributed the week six Bible study outline, focusing on Galatians 3:23–29. The selected verse for memorization will be 1 John 5:11–12 (see Appendix M).

Week Six

The researcher collected the completed Bible study questions from week five. The sermon introduced the God-In-You principle of sanctification, emphasizing that while God is

ultimately responsible for a believer's spiritual growth, their effort is still crucial. The sermon focused on the characteristics of sanctification rooted in judicial, covenantal, spiritual, and essential principles (refer to Appendix L), which are foundational to addressing anxiety associated with spiritual growth. The teaching session included an exegetical study of selected Philippians 1–4 verses, exploring how believers are established, defined, maintained, and united with Christ (refer to Appendix K). Additionally, the researcher distributed the Bible study outline for week seven, which delves into Ephesians 2:1–10 and how believers are made alive in Christ (refer to Appendix M). The verse to memorize for the week was Ephesians 2:8–9.

Week Seven

The researcher collected the Bible study questions for week six, centering on “The Work of One.” The sermon highlighted the believer's righteousness before God through monergistic justification and sanctification (see Appendix L), drawing from specific passages from Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, 1 Timothy, Philippians, and Hebrews, supporting the God-in-you principle. The researcher used the teaching session to interpret Romans 7:15–8:2, emphasizing the monergistic work of God through Jesus Christ in the *simul justus et peccator* (see Appendix K). This principle posits that believers are both saints and sinners concurrently and, as a result, are in dire need of the monergistic work of God for their spiritual development. Additionally, the researcher disseminated the Bible study outline for week eight, focused on Galatians 2:11–21, with a verse to memorize in Galatians 2:20 (see Appendix M).

Week Eight

The researcher gathered the Bible study questions for week seven. The podcast sermon delved into the theme “Do vs. Done,” discussing the dichotomy between the law and the gospel

and their impact on anxiety related to spiritual growth (see Appendix L). An expository sermon was presented, drawing from selected texts in Matthew, James, Romans, Galatians, and 1 Corinthians (see Appendix L). The sermon emphasized that both the law and the gospel play distinct roles in a believer's sanctification, but when combined, they lose their efficacy and lead to anxiety in Christians. The teaching session explored the fundamental principles of the "Do vs. Done" theme (see Appendix K), highlighting how the law embodies the practical righteousness of believers in their spiritual growth while the gospel represents their positional righteousness in spiritual growth. The teaching session spanned approximately 45 minutes and concluded with a fifteen-minute question and answer period. The final Bible study outline for Embracing Spiritual Growth was distributed, covering Hebrews 4:1–16 and the theme of "Rest," featuring a memorization verse from Hebrews 4:11 (see Appendix M).

Week Nine

The researcher gathered the final Bible study questions from week eight and completed the final sermon and teaching session, which included Matthew 11:28–30, accompanied by selected text from Jeremiah, Hebrews, Philippians, and John. The final theme was "Rest," which was discussed as God sanctifying believers by strengthening their faith through grace (see Appendix L). The teaching session included an explanation of the Bible study Hebrews 4:1–16 and the believer's rest in a covenant union with Christ (see Appendix K) while integrating all eight themes of the Embracing Spiritual Growth curriculum. It was emphasized that no performance is required to enter God's rest. The teaching session lasted approximately 40 minutes, followed by a twenty-minute final question and answer session to conclude the theme of "Rest." The researcher distributed post-project questionnaires and surveys and reminded participants to return them next week (see Appendices G and H). Finally, a reminder was given

that next week will be the recorded post-project group interview and the completion of the intervention (see Appendix I).

Week Ten

The researcher gathered all post-project questionnaires and surveys (see Appendices G and H) and facilitated and documented the post-project group interview (see Appendix I). The researcher sought extensive feedback on the questions. An after-action review was conducted to allow participants to share their thoughts on the program. All questions and answer session responses will be incorporated into the research findings in Chapter Five.

Outcome expectations

The researcher anticipates that the intervention will yield more significant qualitative outcomes than quantitative ones. The qualitative data are expected to indicate increased awareness and implementation of spiritual growth through a covenantal relationship with Christ. This deeper understanding will positively impact the participants individually and as a group by enhancing their sense of God's work in their sanctification. The researcher will deem the intervention successful if participants demonstrate an improved comprehension of their covenantal bond with Christ, enabling them to better cope with anxiety related to their spiritual growth.

Each participant was assigned a specific number at the top right corner of their surveys and questionnaires. All corresponding surveys and questionnaires must be labeled with their assigned number to maintain consistency. The success of the intervention will be gauged by an expansion in subjective thematic codes and phrases supporting a believer's covenant union with

Christ for spiritual growth and by an objective variance of less than 0.05 in a t-test analysis throughout the intervention.

Conclusion

The Embracing Spiritual Growth intervention was a carefully designed ten-week curriculum with the primary goal of equipping participants to address the anxiety and challenges often associated with spiritual growth effectively. The program was structured to include an initial introduction week and a concluding session, ensuring a comprehensive and supportive experience for all participants. Throughout the ten weeks, the focus was firmly placed on aiding participants in comprehending, internalizing, and actively applying the concept of their covenant union with Christ.

Participation in the program entailed attending an engaging eight-week sermon series through a podcast, immersing in an in-depth eight-week teaching series, and undertaking eight weekly individual Bible studies. These various components were intentionally integrated to provide a holistic approach to spiritual growth and development.

To gauge the effectiveness of the methodology, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected at the commencement and conclusion of the program. Additionally, the progress of individual Bible study completion was closely monitored throughout the ten-week period. This comprehensive approach allowed for a thorough assessment of the intervention's impact on the participants' spiritual growth and development.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Introduction

The researcher used a triangulation approach with interviews, questionnaires, and surveys to ensure accurate analysis and minimize bias. Participants completed pre- and post-intervention group interviews, pre- and post-questionnaires, and Likert surveys to evaluate their knowledge and application of a covenant union with Christ. Additionally, they answered open-ended questions from weekly Bible study outlines to assess their progress throughout the project.

Collective Results

Results from the Group Interview

In the Embracing Spiritual Growth intervention, a total of 18 participants were actively involved in the initial interviews, and sixteen continued to participate in the final interview. The interviews were structured around open-ended questions (see Appendix I), focusing on the participants' spiritual experiences and their understanding of their connection with Christ from a covenantal perspective. The researcher transcribed the pre- and post-recorded interviews and completed the six-step process for applying the Thematic Analysis method. The interview questions were as follows:

Table 4.1. Group interview questions

Group Interview Questions	
1)	Please describe the importance of spiritual growth.
2)	What does it mean to grow spiritually?
3)	What is the purpose of the Christian life?
4)	How does the Bible describe something becoming holy?
5)	What does the Bible mean when it says believers are “in Christ” or “in the Lord?”
6)	Regarding spiritual growth, explain the relationship between God’s actions and your actions.
7)	What is a biblical covenant?
8)	Please describe why biblical covenants are essential in the life of a Christian.
9)	How do you understand the biblical concept that a Christian is a sinner and a saint simultaneously?
10)	What has been the impact of sin on humanity?

Pre-Intervention Group Interview

During the initial interview, it became apparent that the responses of all eighteen participants regarding their covenantal connection with Christ in dealing with spiritual growth anxiety were multifaceted. Most of them emphasized performance-based methods of spiritual growth and viewed their relationship with God as a matter of collaboration. The keywords and phrases derived from the initial interview were used to establish codes that indicated an understanding of spiritual growth from a perspective of personal efforts, performance, standing before God based on individual performance, and adhering to the commands of God. Themes arose from the keywords and codes, supporting a view of spiritual growth as performance-based through a system of merit and personal efforts. Concepts then developed from the keywords,

codes, and themes pointed to spiritual growth focused on human responsibility to the extent that mankind is seen as capable of spiritual growth to validate and maintain its good standing with God. This perspective led individuals to pursue their spiritual progress cooperatively with God, quickly leading to spiritual growth anxiety as efforts came short of perfection. The illustration vividly describes the transformative journey through the ten pre-intervention group interviews, highlighting the potential for profound change in spiritual growth perspectives.

Table 4.2. Pre-Intervention group interview analysis

	Key Words	Codes	Theme	Concept
1	I am drawing. My response I am striving. I produce Not growing, then dying Bearing fruit	Personal Efforts	Works Sanctification	Capable
2	My proof of faith To set an example I am maturing. I am learning. I understand.	Personal Efforts	Merit-Based Sanctification	Validation
3	To teach Spread, and share the gospel To recognize God To serve To bring others to Christ To be born again To separate from the world	Personal Efforts Personal Outcomes	Purpose-Driven Sanctification	Pursuing
4	Separating Difference between Being sept apart Willing to sacrifice	Personal Efforts Status	Merit-Based Sanctification	Validation
5	Living in you Adopted Chosen Set Apart Must Abide I have accepted. I have been given: Power, Strength, and Righteousness	Received Ability Status	Merit-Based Sanctification	Personal Development

6	<p>God begins, and we finish. God starts us in growth. God provides, and we cooperate. God chose, and we reacted. God's will and my will God does His part, and we do ours. God forgives, and we live an acceptable life.</p>	Partnership	God Plus Me	Cooperation
7	<p>Promise Promise from God A deal that is conditional A bond Action and reaction Conditional</p>	Subject to Cooperation	Determined by Cooperation	Contingent
8	<p>It shows the character of God. God does what He says. God's choice God's Word through His covenants God keeps His promises. God's promises are fulfilled. Covenants are never broken.</p>	Declaration	God's Sovereignty	Assurance
9	<p>Trying Sinful nature Prevents Fail Not completely justified Not completed Positional saints Free will Grace Flesh</p>	Performance Outcomes	Merit-Based Sanctification	Responsibility
10	<p>Death Separation Increased pain and punishment Cursed Murder Downfall of humanity Enemy Division Hatred Chaos Destruction</p>	Relational Worldview	Man-Centered	Anxiety

In the Thematic Analysis process for qualitative methods, the final step involves creating a conceptual model based on the research findings.¹ This model utilized the researcher's theory to address spiritual growth anxiety, focusing specifically on the concept of covenant union with Christ. The data obtained from the pre-intervention group interview identified key concepts such as capability, validation, pursuit of personal development and enrichment, cooperation, contingency, assurance, responsibility, and anxiety. The pre-intervention conceptual model of spiritual growth derived from the group interview, indicated that the contributing factors to spiritual growth anxiety among the participants were the abundant use of performance-based methods to ensure, maintain, and validate their progressive sanctification, which greatly contributed to their spiritual growth anxiety.

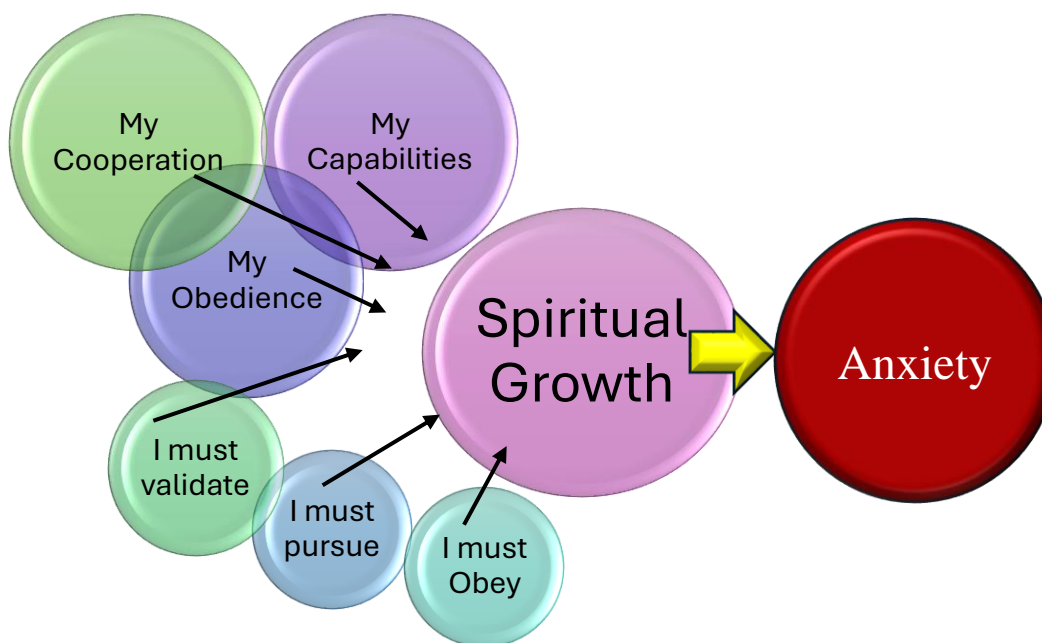


Figure 4.1. Pre-Intervention conceptual model

¹ Muhammad Naeem, Wilson Ozuem, Kerry Howell, and Silvia Ranfagni, "A Step-by-Step Process of Thematic Analysis to Develop a Conceptual Model in Qualitative Research," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* no. 22 (2023): 13, accessed June 11, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231205789>.

Post-Intervention Group Interview

During the post-intervention group interview, the subjective data provided by the fifteen participants was purposeful and clearly articulated. Their collective perspective on spiritual growth portrayed it as a result of God's unilateral action, with their contributions being borne out of Christ's work within them through the Spirit. The codes and keywords derived from the post-interview data indicated an interpretation of their spiritual growth in the context of a promised union with Christ within the framework of the new covenant, where their efforts were seen as a manifestation of His work within them. These codes and keywords formed themes that supported a conceptualization of spiritual growth predicated on God's sovereignty, his covenant promise, and a union with Him through Jesus Christ, resulting in both definitive and progressive sanctification. The qualitative data produced concepts that revolved around the central theme of God dwelling within, as illustrated by a covenant union with Christ. The following illustration describes the flow through each of the ten post-intervention group interviews.

Table 4.3 Post-Intervention group interview analysis

	Key Words	Codes	Theme	Concept
1	Christ is in us. Christ has given. God leads. Not earned. Not a task. God-given. God makes us holy. Seeking Christ. For others. Not earned. Growth for others. Draw others to Christ.	Work of Christ Monergism	Union	God in You
2	Relationship. More like Christ. Relying on Christ. Dependent on Christ. Allowing Jesus. Bonded to Christ. Promise from God. Covenant bond. Unified with Christ. Union. Christ is the vine, staying connected to the vine. Because of Christ. Christ gets the glory. In Christ. Alive to Christ.	Work of Christ	Union	God in You

3	The gospel. The Kingdom of God. Serve Christ. Glorify God. Be in the light. Freedom in Christ. Thy will be done. Glory to Christ. For Christ. Representative of Christ.	Servant	Discipleship	Glorification
4	God makes it. God declares it. A gift from God. God commands it. God's presence. By God. Through God alone. Words of God. Set apart by God. Christ made. Separated. God calls.	Monergism	Sovereignty of God	Sanctification
5	Indwelt. The truth of God. Promise. Jesus in me. Our sanctification. Adopted by God. Chosen. Union. New covenant promise. Covenant. Union with Christ. Blood of Christ. Christ is in us. The glory of God is in us. All in Christ. No anxiety. Do not worry in Christ.	Work of Christ	Union	God in You
6	Perfect vs flawed. Cannot add to the cross. God enables us. Never for our merit. God works first. God's work in us. My actions come second. God changes. Through God's works, mine are done. Dependence on God.	Monergism	God's Work Enables	God in You
7	Promise. Promise from God. All point to Christ. Progressively to Christ. I cannot influence. Union with God. Agreement. Conditional and unconditional.	Monergism	Determined by God	Dependency
8	Point to Christ. We believe God. New covenant promise. The promise of Christ. God's promises will not fail. Cannot be sanctified without them. Confidence. Union with Christ. Absolute. Hope. Meaning.	Declaration of Assurance	Covenant Union	Guarantee

9	Law and gospel. Flesh and gospel. Christ alone sanctifies. We are sanctified through Christ in us. Mankind cannot justify themselves. God sees us in Christ. Truth. The process of sanctification in Christ. Union with Christ.	Monergism Law and Gospel	Sanctification in Christ	God in You
10	Need for Christ. Healed in Christ. Need a union with Christ. Draws us to God. Separates us from God. Shame. Brought us Christ. Christ alone is our sanctification. The path back to God through Christ.	Christian Worldview	The Saint and Sinner Relationship	God in You

Following the post-intervention interview, key concepts were identified, including the significance of God in the process of sanctification, the glorification of God in the Christian life, the precedence of dependency over obedience, and God's assurance of spiritual growth through the new covenant with Jesus Christ. The conceptual model of spiritual growth post-intervention suggests that the primary factor contributing to spiritual growth is the sovereign act of God through Christ. Participants understood that spiritual growth is only possible through union with Christ, and their efforts do not secure, sustain, or validate the sanctification they already possess in union with Him. The following illustration reflects the conceptual model.

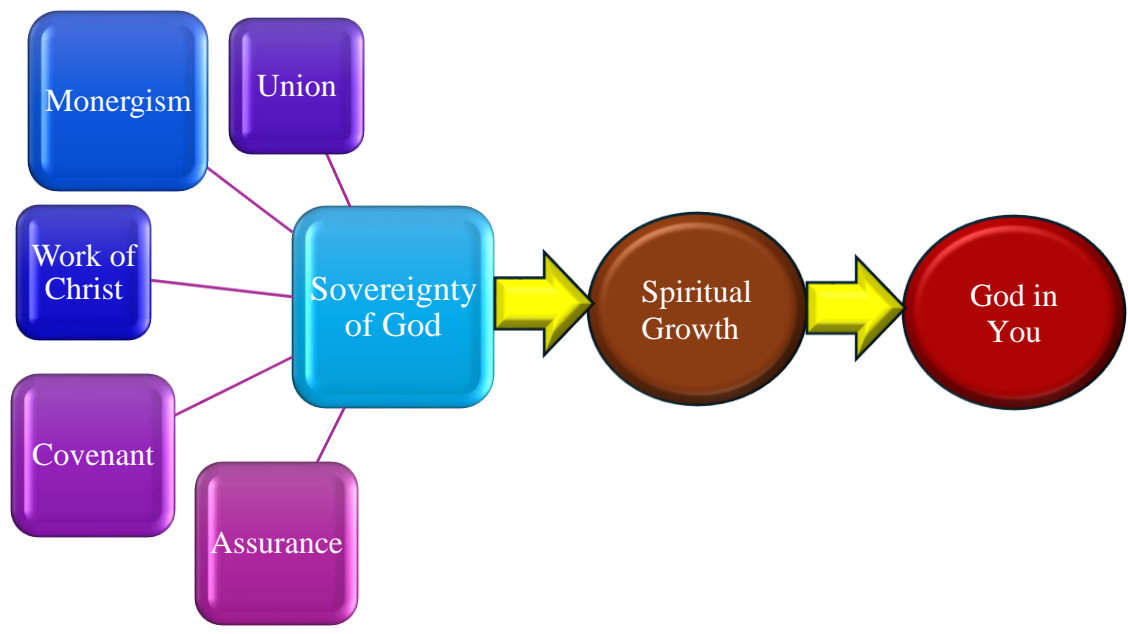


Figure 4.2. Post-Intervention conceptual model

Results from the Questionnaires

The qualitative data obtained from pre- and post-intervention questionnaires underwent thematic analysis, following the process used for group interviews. Sixteen questionnaires, not paired but collected from the same participants before and after the intervention, were collectively evaluated to maximize effectiveness. Thirteen identical open-ended questions were presented before and after the intervention for the participants to answer. The study used a set of questions to explore six specific categories related to participants' comprehension and application of spiritual growth. The aim was to investigate how their responses influence spiritual growth anxiety. The categories included Spiritual Growth, God's Sovereignty, Human Responsibility, Union in Christ, Covenant, and Law and Gospel.

Pre-Intervention Questionnaire

In the first category, Spiritual Growth, participants were asked to define spiritual growth, describe the impact of the relationship between law and gospel on spiritual growth, and explain how to recognize spiritual growth. The responses focused on the actions that Christians take to achieve spiritual growth. Examples of reactions included “Allowing Christ to live in and through me,” “Renewing my mind by being in the word,” “Living in a way that brings glory to Jesus,” “Being like a tree that produces better and better fruit,” and “Examining the things I do every day.” The findings of the thematic analysis are presented in figure 4.3.

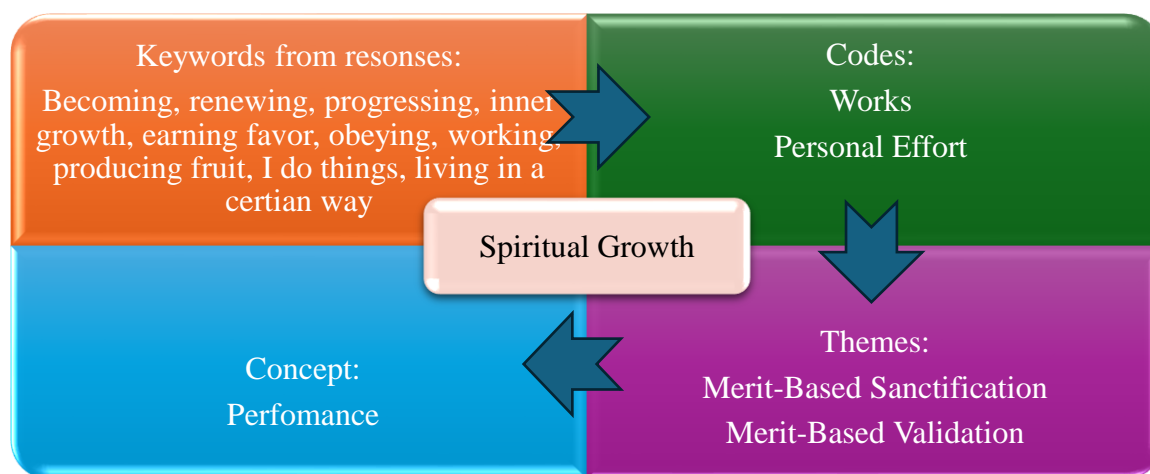


Figure 4.3. Pre-Intervention questionnaire spiritual growth

The second category is centered on the concept of God’s Sovereignty, examining the implications of the biblical assertion that all things have been created through and for Christ. It also investigates the role of God in spiritual development. Some of the responses included: “God intended to create all things for Christ,” “God created for His glory,” “What God initiated in Christ, I must complete,” “Christ provides guidance, and I must respond,” and “Christ is like a mentor to me.”

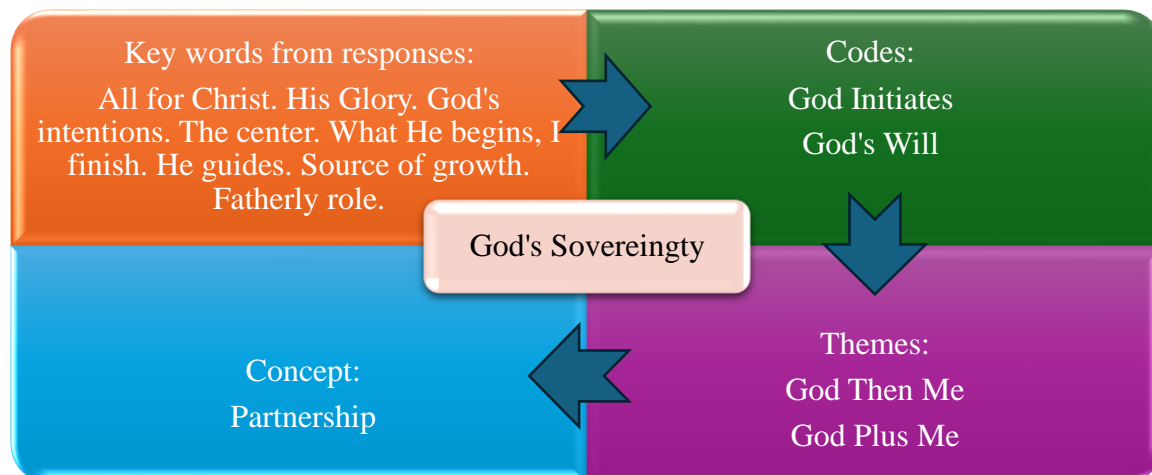


Figure 4.4. Pre-Intervention questionnaire God's sovereignty

Only one inquiry was made in the third category, focusing on human responsibility in spiritual progression: "What role do you play in spiritual growth?" This question played a crucial part in addressing concerns of anxiety related to spiritual growth. The responses predominantly centered around the individual's efforts and actions within the Christian framework. This perspective was evident in answers such as, "I must adopt a childlike stance in spiritual growth," "I need to listen, follow, and obey to achieve spiritual growth," "I have to seek Him and His gifts actively," "I must allow God to work within me," and "I must consistently immerse myself in the Word and learn to facilitate spiritual growth." The flow of the thematic analysis can be viewed in the following illustration.

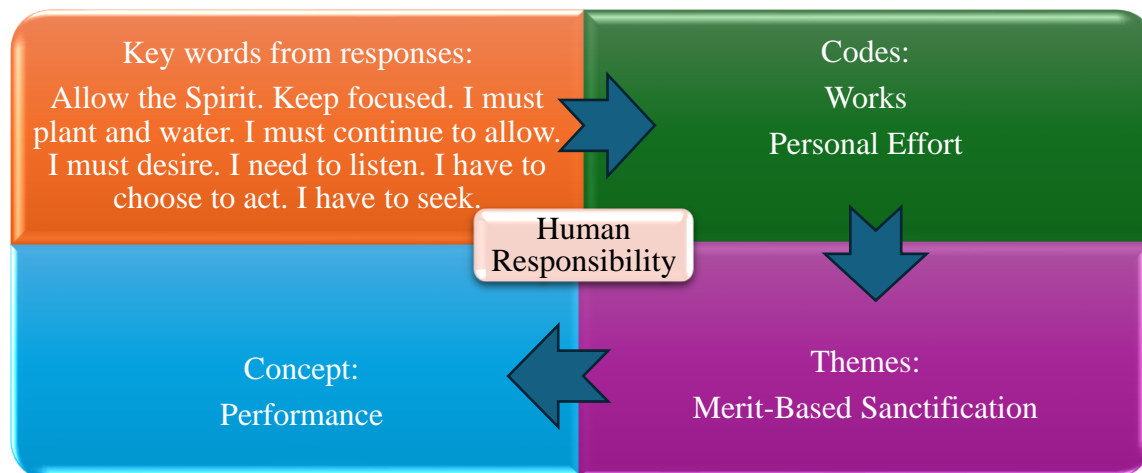


Figure 4.5. Pre-Intervention questionnaire human responsibility

In category four, the participants were assessed on their union with Christ and spiritual growth, addressing the questions: “How would you describe your relationship with Christ?” and “Describe what it means to be united to Christ.” Analysis of the responses revealed that the participants perceived their union with Christ as a collaborative partnership characterized by mutual action, with a predominant focus on the benefits derived by the Christians from this union. Responses varied, encompassing action-oriented perspectives such as, “I seek His guidance in all my actions and thoughts,” to outcomes-oriented statements such as, “I engage in more frequent Bible study,” “He serves as my role model and I emulate Him,” and “He acts as my coach and mentor.” The following illustration serves to describe the thematic flow of the responses.

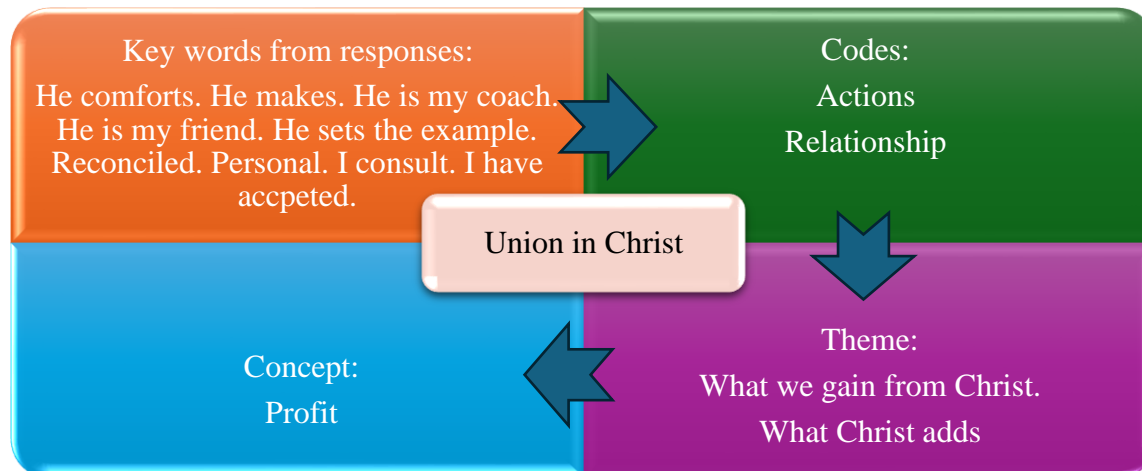


Figure 4.6. Pre-Intervention questionnaire union in Christ

In category five, the researcher assessed the participants' grasp of the covenant concept and its significance in the Christian lifestyle. This category included questions such as defining the biblical term covenant in one's own words and elaborating on the importance of a promise from God. Most respondents perceived a biblical covenant primarily as a promise from God. They articulated responses such as "God's promises sealed in the blood of Jesus," "God's promise to a person or nation," and "My agreement with God that I am saved, forgiven, and promised eternal life." Some participants emphasized the certainty and infallibility of these promises, stating, "It is without fail," "God is faithful to keep His promises," and "Whatever He promises, He delivers." The responses to covenant-related questions regarding spiritual growth are illustrated in figure 4.7.

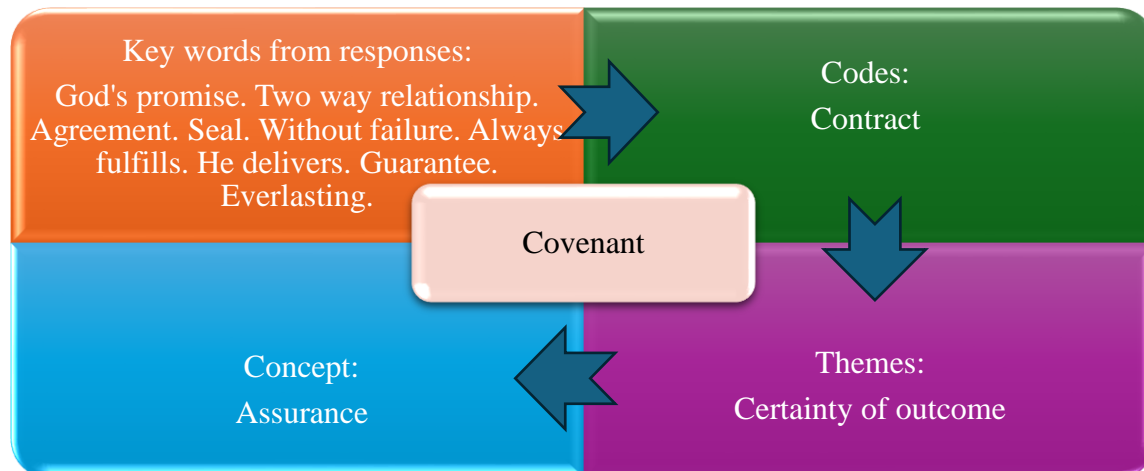


Figure 4.7. Pre-Intervention questionnaire covenant

The final section of the questionnaire focused on discerning the distinction between law and gospel. Questions related to the biblical principles of the gospel and the law were posed, along with inquiries about the relationship between the two. Responses about the gospel emphasized the Christian response, touching on themes such as sharing the good news of Christ, repentance, and serving Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. When discussing the law, the emphasis was on works of obedience, referencing standards for Christians to follow, the requirements for righteousness, and the rules in the Ten Commandments. Descriptions of the relationship between the law and the gospel are centered on works and performances by Christians, contemplating aspects such as drawing closer to God, the role of the law as the foundation for man, and the requirement of perfection. A thematic outline is referenced in figure 4.10.

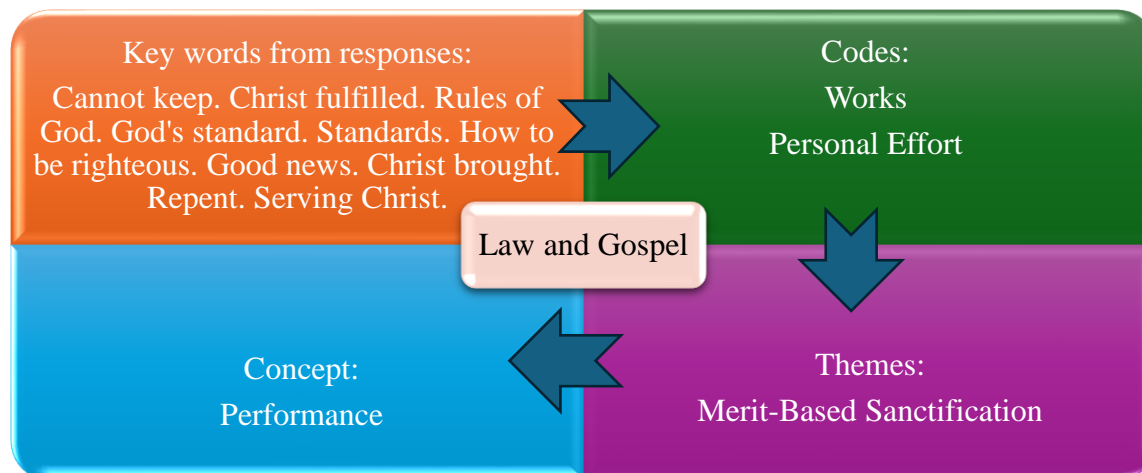


Figure 4.8. Pre-Intervention questionnaire law and gospel

The conceptual model derived from the pre-intervention questionnaire showed similar results to that derived from the pre-intervention group interview. Both indicated that participants' perceptions of spiritual development were associated with their individual performance and personal efforts, leading to a merit-based process of sanctification. However, after the intervention, there was a significant shift in participants' responses, indicating a change in their understanding of spiritual growth. This shift suggests that the intervention had a positive impact on their perceptions, leading to a more God-centered view of spiritual growth.



Figure 4.9. Pre-Intervention questionnaire conceptual model

Post-Intervention Questionnaire

In the post-intervention questionnaire, the transformative impact of the intervention was evident in participants' answers. When asked to respond to questions concerning spiritual

growth, their responses underwent a significant change. The focus shifted from individual performance and personal efforts to God’s monergistic actions to grow a Christian spiritually. In answer to the question “What is spiritual Growth?” the responses were “The work of the Spirit within me,” “A result of my union with Christ,” “Comes only from God,” and “For the good of others and the glory of God.” This shift in perspective underscores the profound impact of the intervention on their understanding of spiritual growth.

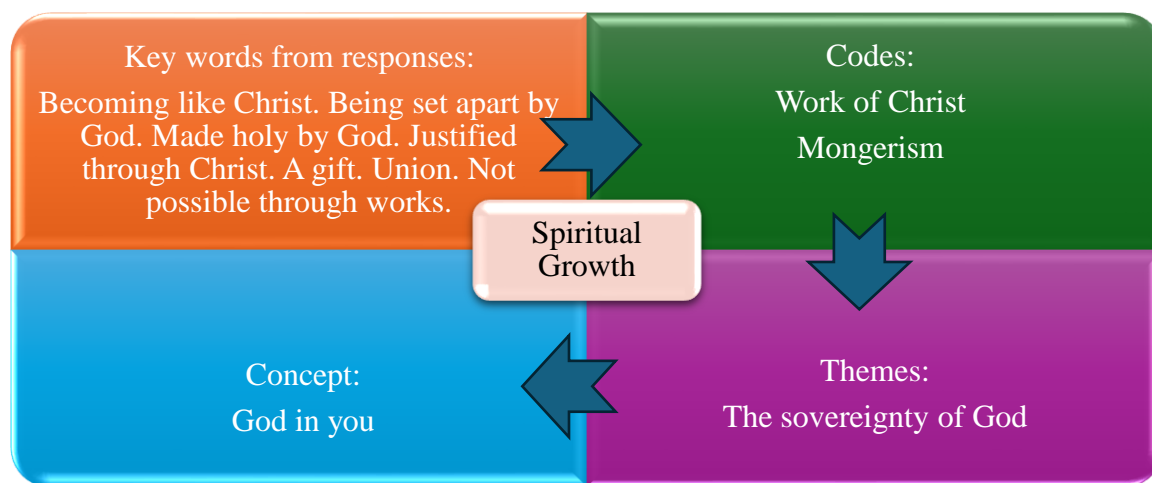


Figure 4.10. Post-Intervention questionnaire spiritual growth

There was a notable shift in responses among the participants from the pre-intervention questionnaire in the questions related to God’s sovereignty, which refers to the belief that God is in control of everything. When asked about the role of God in spiritual growth, participants stated that “God is responsible for all of it,” “He is at work in me 100 percent,” “God receives all the glory for my spiritual growth,” and “My spiritual growth is based on His will and good pleasure, not my works.” These responses indicate a shift in the participants’ understanding of God’s sovereignty in spiritual growth, suggesting a change in their theological perspective after the intervention.



Figure 4.11. Post-Intervention questionnaire God's sovereignty

In examining the third category of human responsibility in spiritual growth, the responses indicated a clear shift from human effort towards the emphasis on the work of God. When asked about their role in spiritual growth, participants consistently highlighted the work of God within them. Their responses included statements such as “My responsibility is nothing apart from God,” “I am dependent on God to fulfill His will,” “My role is only realized through the work of Christ,” and “My obedience is preceded by my complete reliance on God to work in me 100 percent.” These responses form a thematic flow that emphasizes the participants’ recognition of their dependence on God for their spiritual growth. This suggests a shift in their understanding of human responsibility in spiritual growth after the intervention.

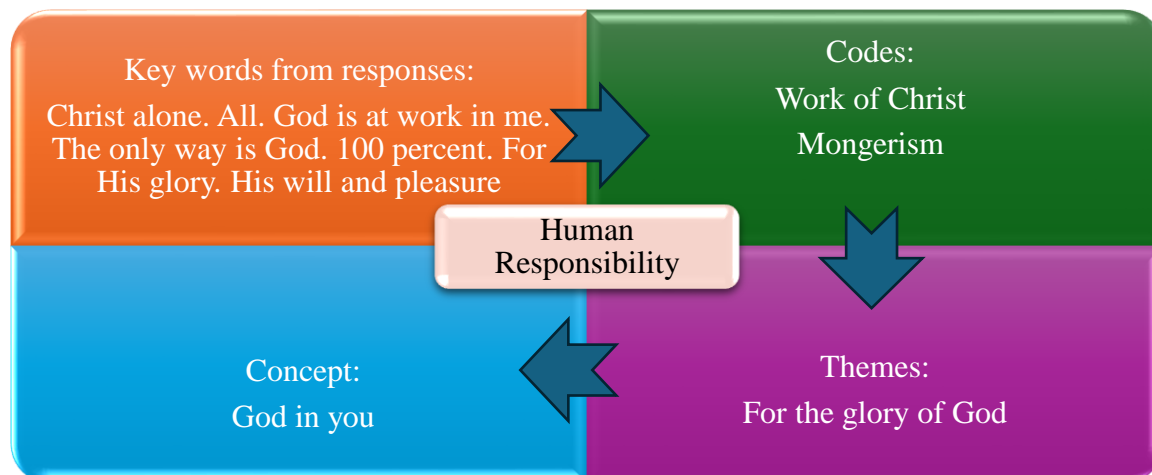


Figure 4.12. Post-Intervention questionnaire human responsibility

In the fourth category, questions were again asked, “How would you describe your relationship with Christ?” and “Describe what it means to be united in Christ.” In answer to the first question, participants emphasized that their relationship with Christ was one of unification with Christ not just as an outside source of salvation but as an internal source of justification and sanctification. Examples were, “I am cloaked in Christ’s righteousness because He is in me,” “I desire what is good because He desires what is good,” and “His union with me is essential for my spiritual growth.” In answer to the second question, the answers were consistent: “I am dependent on Christ for all things,” “God is in me through Christ,” and “He chose me to be united with Him through no work of mine.” This shift in their understanding of their relationship with Christ suggests that the intervention positively impacted their spiritual development, leading to a deeper and more personal relationship with Christ.

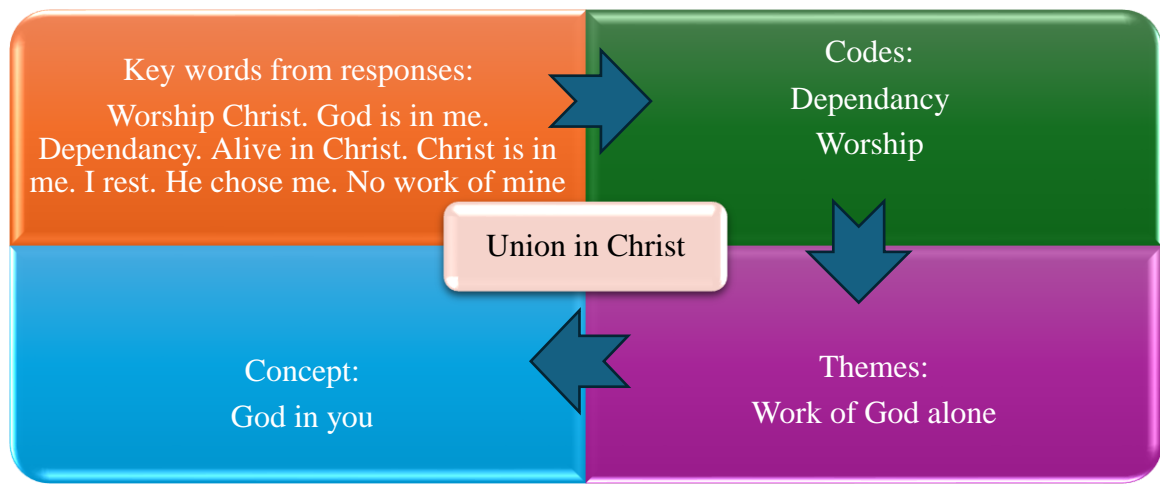


Figure 4.13. Post-Intervention questionnaire union in Christ

In the post-intervention questionnaire, participants reiterated their views on the biblical concept of covenant, emphasizing that it represents an unchangeable promise from God initiated by Him. They described covenants as specific and unbreakable commitments, highlighting that they serve as the framework through which God communicates His will to humanity. Participants also underscored that God sustains and fulfills His promises through covenants. Furthermore, they emphasized the covenants' unchangeable and unbreakable nature and their significance in forming a union with Christ based on the new covenant.

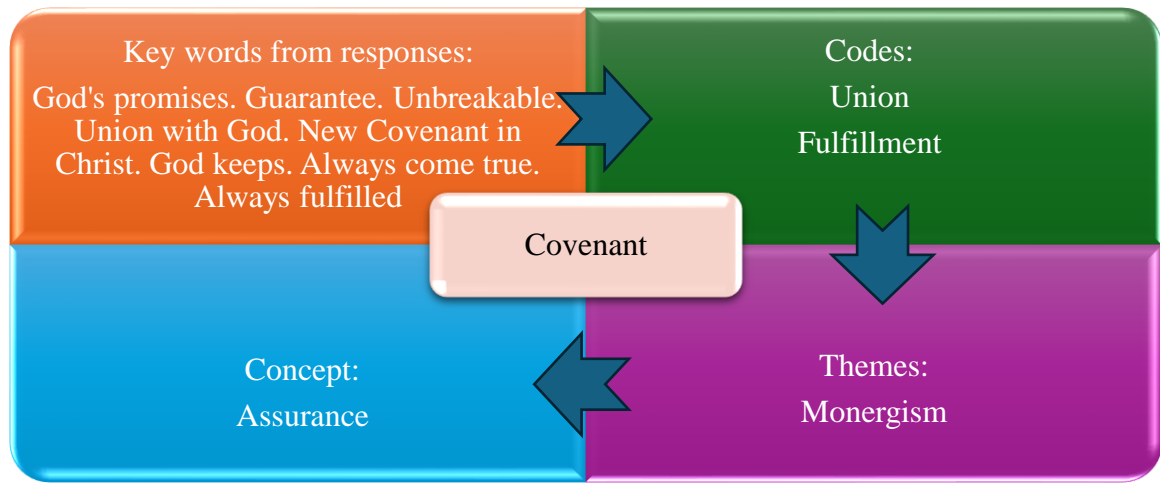


Figure 4.14. Post-Intervention questionnaire covenant

The final spiritual growth category covered in the questionnaire relates to the interconnection between law, gospel, and spiritual development. A significant shift was observed in responses to the question, “What is the biblical principle of the gospel?” Participants overwhelmingly emphasized that the principle of the gospel is centered on Jesus Christ. Answers included statements such as “The gospel revolves around Jesus,” “The essence of good news lies in Christ alone,” and “It is non-negotiable, the gospel is Jesus Christ, just as our sanctification.” In contrast, when asked about the biblical principle of the law, participants’ responses remained consistent with the initial questionnaire, expressing the need for the law to be upheld perfectly, which is unattainable by humans. They commented that “The law must be perfectly observed” and defined it as encompassing any biblical directive. The responses diverged from the initial questionnaire when addressing the relationship between the law and the gospel in sanctification. Participants acknowledged that the fulfillment of the law is only achievable through Jesus Christ, thereby making independent spiritual growth unattainable. Their responses emphasized that “The law directs believers to the gospel,” “The gospel is the only means to fulfill the law,” and “My righteousness, including all sanctification, is exclusively found in Christ.”

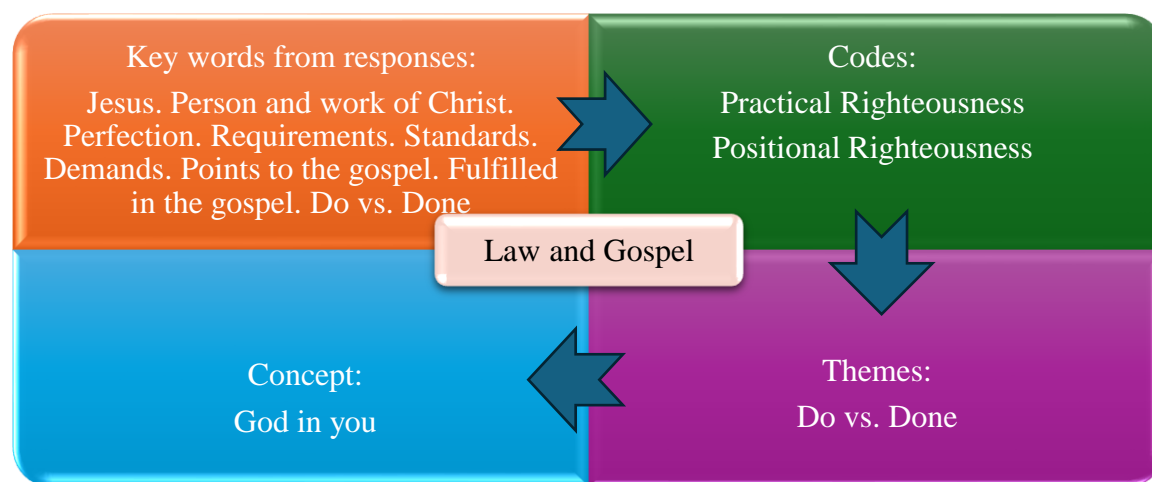


Figure 4.15. Post-Intervention questionnaire law and gospel

The post-intervention conceptual model shows a significant departure from the pre-intervention model. It underscores that participants identified the key factors influencing a believer’s spiritual growth as centered on God’s work in the believer through Jesus Christ rather than being dependent on individual performance. The most prominent themes derived from the keywords gathered from the participants’ feedback were practical righteousness versus positional righteousness. Practical righteousness focused on personal performance in adherence to biblical mandates for spiritual growth, while positional righteousness was solely based on the principle of sanctification through Christ. The diagram below illustrates the progression of the conceptual model following the intervention questionnaire.

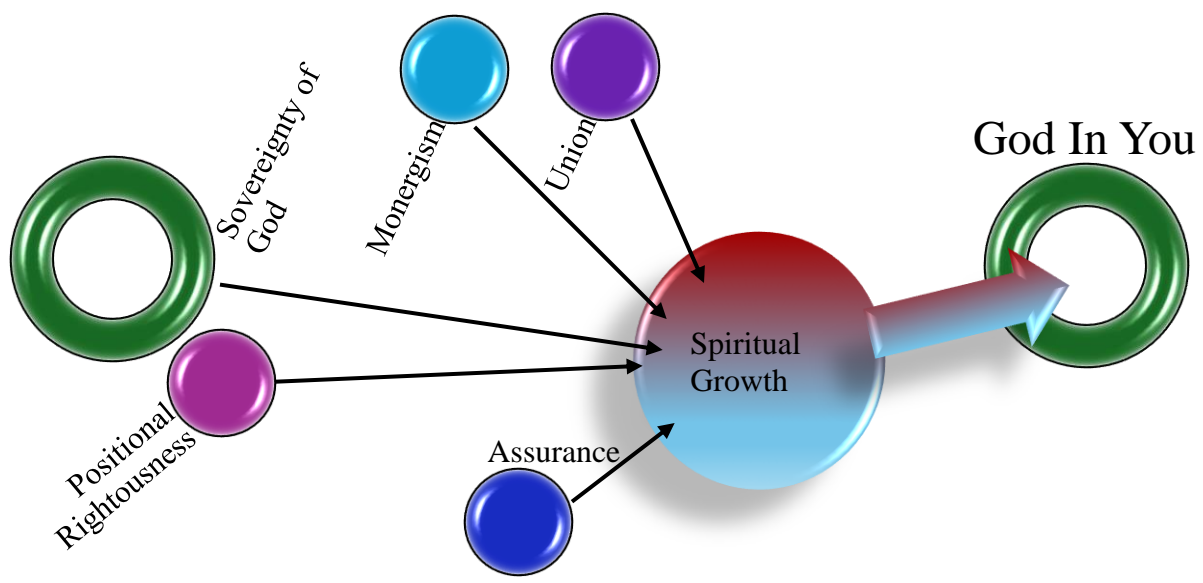


Figure 4.16. Post-Intervention questionnaire conceptual model

Results of the Bible Study Questionnaire

The data from the weekly Bible study questionnaires (see Appendix J) was collected to assist the researcher in evaluating the participants’ progress during the Embracing Spiritual Growth intervention. The questionnaire comprised five recurring open-ended questions related to the specific Scripture sections the participants read each week. The most crucial question for

assessing the ongoing effectiveness of the intervention was, “What does this passage teach you about spiritual growth?” This question was pivotal in understanding the participants’ mindset as they engaged with the assigned Scripture and applied the cumulative teachings and sermons throughout the program. During the first week, which focused on the theme “Do Not Fear” and the Scripture Hebrews 10:1–10, the participants emphasized the work of definitive and progressive sanctification found in the work of Christ. A significant response highlighted the role of God in initiating and completing the work of sanctification in the individual’s life. The second week centered on the theme “Biblical Footings” and the Scripture Romans 3:10–18, and the responses focused on the depravity of mankind and the absolute need for a savior, emphasizing the inability of individuals to seek and respond to God without Christ. The third week’s theme, “Covenant Foundations,” with the assigned reading from Hebrews 8:1–13, revealed the participants’ progression from performance-based sanctification to grace-based sanctification. Responses indicated a shift from earning sanctification to embracing the promise of sanctification through the new covenant in Christ. The following week, themed “Union” with Scripture from Romans 6:8–11, was pivotal for many participants as they realized the critical role of covenant union with Christ in their spiritual growth. The responses reflected a transition from performance-based actions to relying on God’s grace through union with Christ.

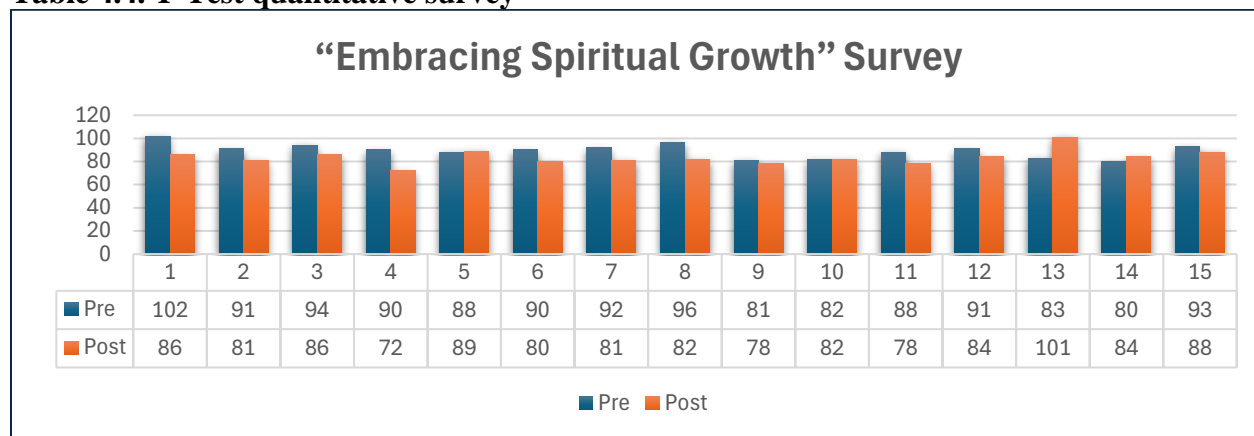
The theme of week five, “God-In-You,” with a passage from Galatians 3:23–29, further demonstrated the participants’ progression through their responses, indicating a deepening understanding of their identity in Christ and the assurance of God’s presence within them. Week six’s theme, “One Working,” with Scripture from Ephesians 2:1–10, highlighted the participants’ grasp of the monergistic work of God in their spiritual growth, emphasizing that all their good works are the result of God’s work and not the cause. The theme of week seven emphasized the

distinction between the law and the gospel with “Do vs. Done” through Galatians 2:11–22. Although the progression with this theme was not as significant, the participants showed a basic understanding that knowledge of the law reveals their need for the gospel in spiritual growth. The final theme, “Rest,” with assigned scriptural reading from Hebrews 4:1–16, indicated a significant progression in the participants’ understanding and application of their promised union with Christ for their sanctification and a shift away from reliance on practical righteousness. Overall, the responses from the study provided valuable insights into the participants’ evolving understanding of spiritual growth and their increasing reliance on Christ for their sanctification.

Results of the Survey

The data collection model for the Embracing Spiritual Growth project involved a third method of conducting pre-and post-intervention surveys to gather quantitative data. The quantitative data was obtained through twenty-six closed-ended questions using a five-choice Likert scale (see Appendix G). The surveys aimed to corroborate or contradict the qualitative data obtained from group interviews and questionnaires based on the mean difference between two set data points, a pre-and post-intervention survey. Fifteen participants responded to the post-intervention survey. To maintain the highest accuracy level in the quantitative analysis, the researcher excluded the pre-intervention survey of Participant #2 because they did not submit a post-intervention survey. A peak value was determined to be 0.012065 of the mean difference between the pre-intervention and post-intervention surveys of the fifteen participants. According to Brown, this value denotes a significant difference between the two data points, indicating successful results.²

² Jerry Brown, “What is a T-Test,” Liberty University Video, December 10, 2018, 11:20, https://canvas.liberty.edu/courses/508741/pages/watch-what-is-a-t-test?module_item_id=59080957.

Table 4.4. T-Test quantitative survey

The researcher observed a significant change in two key data points between the pre-and post-intervention surveys, specifically about questions about a believer’s union with Christ and those focused on spiritual growth. The survey included six questions aimed at gauging a participant’s understanding of their union in Christ and seven questions concerning Christ, the Spirit, and their impact on spiritual growth. The t-test analysis revealed a mean difference of 0.00078 in the “Union In Christ” category and a difference of 0.0286 in the “Christ and Spirit” category, indicating a noteworthy shift in support of the qualitative data addressing spiritual growth anxiety through a believer’s union with Christ.

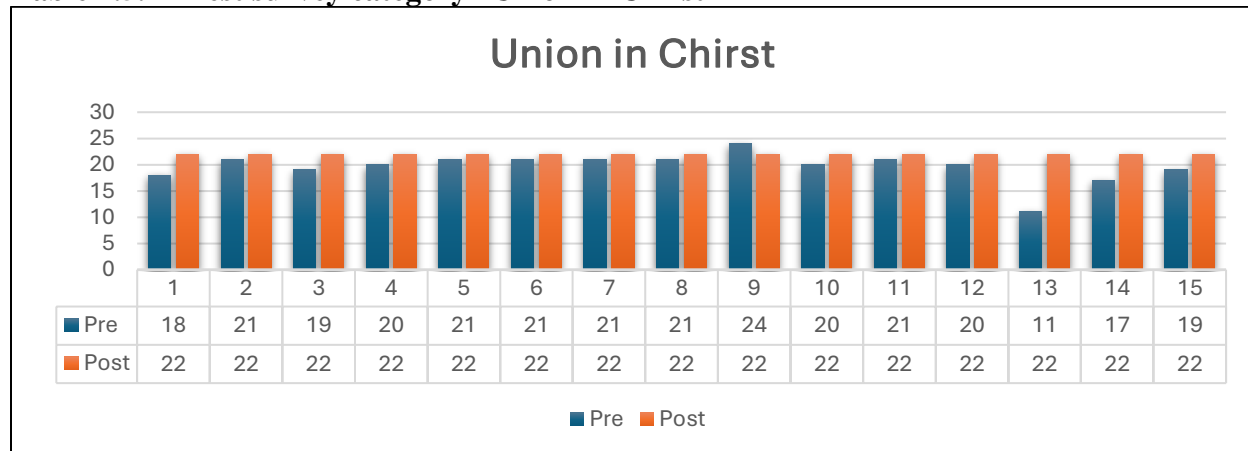
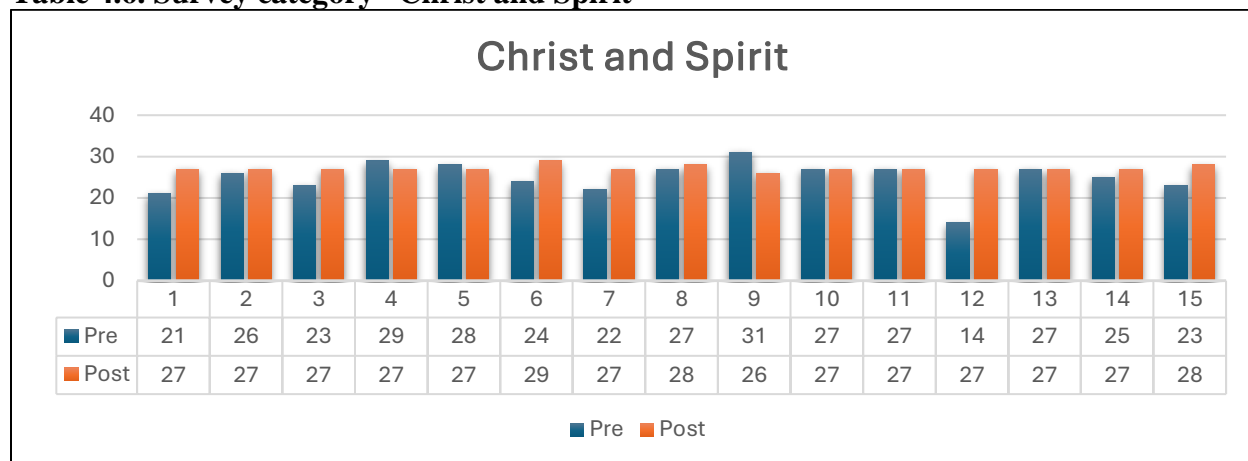
Table 4.5. T-Test survey category “Union in Christ”

Table 4.6. Survey category “Christ and Spirit”

Summary Conclusion

After analyzing the collected data, the researcher found that implementing the Embracing Spiritual Growth approach resulted in participants recognizing their covenant union with Christ as a way of addressing the anxiety that often accompanies progressive sanctification. The qualitative data collected through the group interviews and questionnaires (see Appendices H and I) indicated a notable shift from the pre-intervention position that a believer’s spiritual growth is viewed through the lens of individual performance and then applied in a way to measure, maintain, and validate sanctification, to the post-intervention position that a believer’s spiritual growth was fully dependent on the grace of God through the person and work of Jesus Christ. The results align with Gills’ *God’s Rx for Fear and Worry*, highlighting the detrimental impact of believers relying on themselves for their relationship with God, leading to anxious worry.³ Conversely, embracing a spirit of dependency and thankfulness replaces anxious thinking with rest in God’s love, allowing individuals to enjoy His work in their lives.⁴ The

³ James P. Gills, *God's Rx for Fear and Worry: Biblical Wisdom Confirmed by Science* (Chicago, IL: Charisma House, 2019), 10, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

participants' confidence in spiritual growth increased through the God-in-you principle, a result of their covenant union with Christ, which enabled God to work within them continually for His glory.⁵ Shifting from performance-based to grace-based spiritual growth reduced anxiety related to sanctification. The intervention's success was evident not only in the qualitative data from the interviews and questionnaires but also in the weekly Bible study outlines.

The Bible studies facilitated a gradual expression of participants' thoughts throughout the intervention with a questionnaire that encouraged individual exploration of the Bible's teachings on spiritual growth. Their reflections on sanctification consistently emphasized the sole divine agency at work within them, both spiritually and physically. The qualitative data was complemented by quantitative data gathered from pre- and post-intervention surveys, using a five-point Likert scale to gauge responses to closed-ended questions in four categories: God and Humans, Christ and Spirit, Union with Christ, and Spiritual Growth (see Appendix G). The mean difference of less than 0.05 between the two data points indicated a significant change in participants' understanding and application of spiritual growth following the Embracing Spiritual Growth intervention. The data collected from the three-fold methodology supports the conclusion that implementing this intervention at BrandofMan Ministries could help members realize their covenant union with Christ, leading to increased confidence and reduced anxiety in the process of sanctification.

⁵ Dane C. Ortlund, *Deeper: Real Change for Real Sinners* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 53.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Introduction

The Embracing Spiritual Growth program was designed to alleviate anxiety related to spiritual growth by emphasizing the believer's covenant union with Christ. The program is a three-tiered curriculum comprising sermons, group teachings, and individual Bible study, and was a direct response to a ministry gap identified through discussions with believers struggling with spiritual growth. The curriculum, rooted in the belief that believers actively pursue spiritual growth, aimed to equip them with the tools to comprehend and apply it. The project's thesis was centered around the idea that participants, when guided through the program, would be able to acknowledge and put into practice their covenant union with Christ. This, in turn, was expected to lead to a noticeable increase in confidence and a reduction in anxiety levels as they progressed through the intervention. The data gathered overwhelmingly supported this thesis, providing a solid foundation for the program's success. The researcher will provide a comprehensive review and assessment of the research. This crucial step includes an analysis of the conceptual frameworks, methodologies, and data analysis to arrive at definitive conclusions and recommendations.

Research Implications

When considering the implications of the research, it is crucial to acknowledge the active and integral role of the participants in the Embracing Spiritual Growth study. The initial assumption that all participants would be motivated to deepen their understanding and

application of their connection with Christ in spiritual growth was not only confirmed but exceeded. This personal investment in the program by the participants was a significant factor in its success. The researcher observed that the participants actively engaged in sermons, teaching sessions, and Bible studies, consistently returning completed surveys, questionnaires, and Bible study outlines each week. Their punctuality, politeness, and inquisitiveness demonstrated their eagerness for learning and acknowledgment of the significance of sanctification for believers' advancement. This engaged approach facilitated their ongoing weekly exploration of the promised union between humanity and God through Jesus Christ, underscoring its impact on their spiritual growth.

The second assumption posited that anxiety related to spiritual growth stemmed from a participant's inadequate understanding and implementation of their commitment to Christ in the sanctification process, which stemmed from a deficiency in biblical exegesis. This assumption formed the basis for developing the Embracing Spiritual Growth curriculum, carefully crafted around themes to deepen the participant's grasp of their secure connection with Christ progressively. The validity of this assumption was further underscored by the qualitative data from pre- and post-intervention interviews, revealing a noticeable shift from a performance-oriented approach to one centered on the grace of God within a believer's union with Christ.

Finally, the assumption that a curriculum grounded in reformed systematic theology would be the most effective approach for teaching about the covenant union with Christ in sanctification was also validated. This theological framework influenced the content of weekly sermons, lessons, and Bible study, shaping each thematic element. The practical implication of this assumption was demonstrated through the collection of results, which emphasized the teaching of positional righteousness for spiritual growth rather than practical righteousness. The

success of this approach was successfully measured by analyzing data that showed a significant shift from performance-based sanctification to grace-based sanctification in both qualitative and quantitative data, an outcome significantly influenced by the conceptual framework. This success should instill confidence in the audience about the robustness of the Embracing Spiritual Growth program.

Impact of the Literature Review

The implications of the review of current literature and the theological and theoretical foundations were meticulously examined, leading to a significant connection to the data collected before and after the intervention. This thorough research process ensured the validity and reliability of the findings, instilling confidence in the audience about the robustness of the Embracing Spiritual Growth program.

In the beginning, the researcher was discouraged by the scarcity of literature, specifically focusing on the anxiety experienced by believers concerning their spiritual development. However, as the literature review advanced, it became apparent that while anxiety itself was not the primary focus in discussions of spiritual growth, the factors contributing to anxiety were extensively covered. In his work *Sanctification*, Allen elucidated the issue of spiritual growth anxiety by providing a comprehensive perspective, stressing that the risk for Christians lies in redirecting their focus from Christ towards the practical elements of Christian living.¹ Allen suggested that many challenges for Christians stem from their giving into the temptation to prioritize their performance as Christians over the work of Christ Himself.² John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* provides a classic example of Allen's perspective by primarily focusing on

¹ Allen, *Sanctification*, 169.

² Ibid.

the stark contrast between the performance-based perspective of sanctification and the grace-based perspective. The researcher found the New Testament's biblical references to spiritual growth anxiety, particularly those in Galatians and Hebrews, surprisingly insightful. The apostle Paul's caution to the churches of Galatia against teachings that contradict the gospel's message highlights the importance of emphasizing positional righteousness over practical righteousness for spiritual growth. The intervention data unequivocally demonstrates the effectiveness of teaching spiritual growth from this perspective, underscoring the insignificance of a believer's actions in their sanctification compared to the work already accomplished by Christ. The approach is supported by conceptual models developed from the intervention's survey, questionnaires, and interviews.

The researcher was motivated by a specific area of study from the literature review that served as the blueprint for developing a spiritual growth curriculum: Reformed/Augustinian theology. The key findings of this theological approach emphasized the intricacies of sanctification, comprising definitive and progressive components. These findings underscored the pivotal role of a believer's assured union with God through Jesus Christ in mitigating spiritual growth anxiety. For instance, the researcher highlighted definitive sanctification as an act of God, underscoring the incorporation of Christ's righteousness with the believer through their union with Him. This concept, while distinct from justification, is intricately linked to it. Furthermore, the continuous process of obedience, in which followers progress throughout their lives, is directly related to God's irrevocable act of sanctification. The literature review highlighted this principle as a significant strategy for addressing spiritual growth anxiety, as showcased in the methodology and supported by the collective data.³ The researcher noted that

³ Barrett, *40 Questions*, 206.

the Bible predominantly addresses sanctification in the definitive sense. Nevertheless, subsequent to definitive sanctification, there is an emphasis on progressive sanctification.

The researcher discovered that understanding progressive sanctification in the context of definitive sanctification, as discussed in the literature review, was crucial for a believer's unity with Christ and its impact on addressing anxiety. When the focus is on individual effort rather than on grace, spiritual growth is hindered and replaced by a system of measurement, leading to increased anxiety. This reasoning from the literature was demonstrated in the curriculum through a strong emphasis on themes such as the biblical foundation of spiritual development, the exclusive role of God in the "Work of One," and the distinction between God's grace and human responsibility in "Do vs. Done." These themes had a discernible impact on the outcomes of the intervention.

The researcher found Dane Ortlund's *Deeper: Real Change for Real Sinners* particularly insightful, especially the chapter on union with Christ. Ortlund discusses four principles commonly linked with spiritual growth: "God-not-me," "God-then-me," "God-plus-me," and "God-in-me." The fourth principle, "God-in-me," forms the basis for addressing anxiety related to spiritual growth through a covenant union with Christ. The principle discussed aligns with the thesis of the study, where participants were directed to shift from a merit-based to a grace-based approach by applying the "God-in-me" principle while still acknowledging the importance of human responsibilities in sanctification. The researcher was encouraged by observing positive results from this applied principle, as evidenced in the conceptual models of the qualitative data and supported by a significant change in the quantitative data.

The "God-in-me" principle, as set forth by Ortlund, finds affirmation within the covenant theology expounded in Gentry and Wellum's *Kingdom through Covenant*, Michael Horton's

Introducing Covenant Theology, and Parker's Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies.

Incorporating the believer's union with Christ from a covenant theological perspective, emphasizing God's covenantal nature, was deemed imperative. This approach revealed a prominent theme of the monergistic nature of the covenantal union with Christ, which is evident in the qualitative data and is resonant with participants. This emphasis became significant to the intervention when highlighting the development and sustenance of spiritual growth through God's promise that was eternally sealed with the blood of Christ under the new covenant. Essentially, the covenantal dimension of the believer's union with Christ diminished, if not eliminated, the basis for spiritual growth anxiety, particularly the pursuit of performance-based or practical righteousness.

Assessing the Methodology

The intervention's design and implementation were not unique to the Embracing Spiritual Growth curriculum. Christian ministry has long utilized sermons, in-person teaching sessions, and Bible studies to enhance Christian theology and doctrine. The researcher found Jones' doctoral thesis model encouraging, as he recorded a successful intervention to help believers recognize their identity in Christ at Crossline Church.⁴ The researcher found that Jones' four-tiered methodology, in-person sermons, teaching, small group sessions, and a private Bible study fit well with the ministry context of BrandofMan Ministries, with a few alterations to increase efficacy in the ministry context at BrandofMan. The researcher made several adjustments to the survey. First, the sermon delivery method was changed from in-person to a recorded podcast due to time constraints. This change proved to be essential and was anticipated in the intervention

⁴ Jones, "Becoming Who You Already," 99.

design. Small group sessions were also eliminated as the teaching sessions already fit the small group criteria. Finally, a verse memorization element was added to the Bible study outlines.

However, it was ineffective as participants rarely attempted to memorize the verses, rendering it insignificant for the final data analysis. Consequently, the researcher would advise not including this element in future research.

O'Neill-Blackwell's *Engage: The Trainer's Guide to Learning Styles* was instrumental in developing an intervention curriculum that accommodated diverse learning styles. It introduced the 4MAT system, advocating for a four-quadrant approach to tailor learning through self-discovery, discussion, coaching, and information.⁵ The approach was well-aligned with the relevant literature, encompassing theological and theoretical perspectives. In the context of relevance, self-discovery was a critical aspect. This aspect of learning style was highlighted in the individual Bible studies, where participants could delve into self-study and reflect on the assigned text without external influences apart from sermons and teaching sessions. The participants' progress was evident in the weekly questionnaires, where they shared how the assigned text contributed to their spiritual growth. Notably, the participants applied the accumulated teachings and insights gained throughout the intervention to their Bible study, as evidenced by the qualitative data collected from the Bible study responsive questions. The intervention design effectively addressed the four quadrants through sermons, teaching lessons, and individual Bible study outlines. The collected data indicated that the 4MAT approach successfully communicated the information to the participants. The 2019 study by Francis et al. encouraged the researcher, which showed that over 60 percent of participants favored spiritual growth pathways that involved sermons, teaching conferences, and independent Bible study. The

⁵ O'Neill-Blackwell, *Engage: The Trainer's Guide*, 38.

researcher found this methodology successful in the Embracing Spiritual Growth curriculum based on the final analysis of the data.

In creating survey questions to elicit detailed information, the researcher gained crucial insights into effective question structuring. Bolton and Brace's book *Questionnaire Design: How to Plan, Structure, and Write Survey Material for Effective Market Research* influenced the construction of these questions, particularly in using keywords within the questions to elicit responses about specific categories.⁶ The authors emphasized the efficacy of personalized questions in prompting responses based on individual accountability in a given subject. For example, instead of asking a general question about spiritual growth, the researcher used specific inquiries to trigger more profound reflections on personal roles in sanctification, resulting in more insightful responses. This approach generated higher-quality subjective responses, which is vital for developing conceptual models. However, it was noted that the open-ended questions could be improved. The researcher noted that specific questions were interconnected, leading to biased responses and affecting the qualitative data collection process, which relied on diverse keywords and phrases to uncover themes and concepts. A suggestion is to categorize questions before finalization to aid the researcher in determining the highest possible effectiveness.

Regarding the Bible study outlines, the researcher observed that the answers provided to the subjective questions revealed some misinterpretations of the assigned text. The researcher suggests including basic contextual information surrounding the assigned text in the Bible study outlines, including some general principles of biblical interpretation and study, to ensure a more comprehensive understanding and application of the author's intent. While participants were encouraged to extrapolate context, this often did not occur. The researcher believes providing

⁶ Bolton, *Questionnaire Design*, 149–51.

this contextual information could lead to more effective post-intervention interviews, questionnaires, and surveys.

The Impact of the Results and Analysis

Chapter Four contains the results and data analysis from the Embracing Spiritual Growth curriculum. The researcher found that analyzing the subjective and objective data collected demonstrated a successful intervention. The qualitative data indicated that the participants transitioned from a human-centered and performance-driven approach to evaluating their spiritual development to a Christ-centered and grace-driven model. This transformation is illustrated by subjective data, substantiated by conceptual models, and the objective data derived from Likert surveys, demonstrating a substantial shift from a practical righteousness to a positional righteousness understanding of spiritual growth.

The researcher has identified potential gaps in the data gathered from interviews and surveys, which may have limited the comprehensiveness of the results. To address this, it is suggested to incorporate questions that specifically explore participants' perceptions of the causes of spiritual anxiety and potential coping strategies. These questions are crucial for comparing pre- and post-intervention qualitative data for analytical purposes. Furthermore, they would focus more on the participants rather than solely on project outcomes, as reflected in the current results.

The researcher found that thematic data analysis enabled them to create keywords and phrases that accurately represented the essential concepts and ideas in the data. This involved selecting keywords that reflected real experiences, a nuanced understanding of the subject matter, and emphasizing repetition, symbols, and metaphors. These keywords and phrases were crucial in developing the codes and themes to build a conceptual model. The researcher was

highly motivated by this qualitative data analysis method as it minimized bias through a progressive six-part text breakdown where the preceding data supported each step. Despite its imperfections, the thematic analysis was comprehensive and straightforward for examining the qualitative data.

The Value of Research Applications

The Embracing Spiritual Growth (ESG) curriculum is designed to be utilized in a ministry setting in various ways. It is specifically tailored for small group Bible studies, aiming to address common anxieties related to spiritual growth among Christians. The curriculum was initially developed for small groups of fifteen members or fewer, drawing from the ministry context of BrandofMan Ministries. While the sermons were initially designed for recorded presentations, they can be adapted for in-person delivery and supplemented by a PowerPoint presentation. The structure of the sermons and teaching sessions emphasizes progressive themes rooted in biblical exposition, making it well-suited for engaging with small groups. Furthermore, the curriculum includes built-in flexibility for interactive question-and-answer sessions after each teaching session, which aligns with the intimate nature of small-group settings. The ESG intervention is ideal for gathering qualitative data within the small group context via pre- and post-intervention group interviews (tailored for small groups), questionnaires, and weekly Bible study outlines. Notably, ESG has demonstrated success in small-group settings through this intervention. The Thematic Method employed by the researcher for qualitative data analysis is ideal for small groups because it prevents data overload and facilitates easier digestion and conceptualization of the collected data.

The Embracing Spiritual Growth program can also be applied as a standalone sermon series for a congregation. The structure and presentation of the sermons received positive

feedback, with participants noting their receptiveness. The ESG sermons are designed for senior or assistant pastors who are responsible for creating sermons for Sunday services. These sermons use an expository approach and are organized thematically, combining exegetical and topical elements. The primary objective is to mitigate the anxiety experienced by Christians who predicate their relationship with God on their performance, a theme prevalent within the writings of the apostle Paul. The sermons are intended to be presented within 30–40 minutes, featuring illustrated introductions, one to three-point applications, and a concluding segment. Like the teaching sessions, the sermon outlines are crafted to serve as a foundation for a PowerPoint presentation.

The ESG curriculum can support specific programs by leveraging a Christian's covenant union with Christ. For example, it can be used to assist grief counseling groups that often experience high levels of anxiety. The monergistic and covenantal nature of the program, which highlights the believer's promised union with Christ as a source of rest rather than a step-based program focused on individual efforts, could greatly benefit such groups as a viable option. Additionally, the curriculum could be used in discipleship groups to provide a targeted guide for fostering spiritual growth through weekly Bible study and reflection. It offers three specific learning modalities to prepare church members and program participants for a Christian life of discipleship through a covenant union with Christ.

The Embracing Spiritual Growth curriculum is easily adaptable for implementation in different church contexts or as part of a thesis project. The 10-week program outlined in Chapter Three provides a comprehensive, step-by-step process for executing the intervention in a ministry setting. This process includes a tri-fold methodology for intervention (sermons, teaching sessions, and Bible study), encompassing data collection and analysis that can be customized to

suit various ministry contexts. The qualitative data collection questions can be tailored to accommodate diverse age groups, ethnicities, genders, and individuals at different levels of faith. The success of the ESG intervention suggests that it can be effectively replicated, provided there is a deep understanding of the biblical material, theological concepts, and proficient delivery.

Research Limitations

The research was significantly limited by its narrow focus solely on participant data, without including a control group to assess data collection methods among non-participants. As a result, the absence of data from non-participants for comparison with participant data may have introduced bias in the qualitative data analysis. The ministry context made it extremely challenging to form an adequate control group for obtaining contrasting data. However, this limitation does not negate the importance of addressing this issue. Assessing a control group composed of individuals who did not participate in the program could have provided an extra means of assessing the methodology's effectiveness on the participants.

An additional constraint was the absence of a comprehensive assessment method for the tri-fold learning methodology, encompassing podcast-delivered sermons, in-person teaching sessions, and take-home individual Bible studies. The researcher primarily relied on oral feedback from participants to assess efficacy, with minimal input from the weekly Bible study outlines. A more effective approach would have been to employ a short survey with descriptive statistics every week to evaluate the methodology's usefulness better.

The researcher identified a final limitation concerning the analysis of qualitative data. Despite using the Thematic Method as a reliable tool to process subjective data, the findings were susceptible to bias. When using any qualitative data analysis method, the inherent subjectivity of the data introduces an element of personal perspective into the analysis. This

effect is amplified when the data collection method developer conducts the analysis. To mitigate this bias, a neutral and independent party, unaffiliated with the intervention, should evaluate the qualitative data.

Further Research

Despite the completion of Embracing Spiritual Growth, multiple research and study areas warrant further action. Attention to theology demands a sustained commitment to serving the cause of Christ through meticulous research. Paul's teachings in Romans 12 should catalyze researchers to explore new avenues of inquiry.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers *and sisters*, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom 12:1–2 NASB)

The following research phase under the Embracing Spiritual Growth curriculum should encompass an in-depth exploration of sustained cognitive assimilation and behavioral adaptations in Christian approaches for managing spiritual growth anxiety over an extended period. The initial, short-term benefits of ESG may enable this transition, but the existing program lacks guarantees regarding the duration of these changes. The researcher suggests carrying out a series of interventions over an extended period to assess the influence of a believer's covenant union with Christ on their spiritual development. In essence, the interventions should consistently highlight the believer's covenant union with Christ as a strategy for assessing the long-term effects of anxiety related to spiritual growth.

Further research addressing spiritual growth anxiety should include a detailed examination of the law and gospel distinction. The conceptual framework revealed an absence of study and practical application of this distinction in Christians' lives and Scripture study. The

application and comprehension of the biblical principles of law and gospel are crucial in facilitating spiritual growth and addressing crises of faith. Understanding how these principles function and how God uses them to communicate His plan of redemption is invaluable in dealing with anxiety during spiritual development. The Embracing Spiritual Growth curriculum effectively explored the law and gospel distinction through the theme “Do vs. Done,” although there is still untapped potential for further enriching the intervention.

One area for prospective research in the Embracing Spiritual Growth curriculum is the exploration of covenant theology within biblical teachings. This specifically focuses on the concept of covenant, which is integral to the very nature of God as Father, Son, and Spirit. A perpetual commitment to one another characterizes their eternal existence. As Michael Horton points out, this divine covenant extends beyond the Godhead to encompass a community of beings, a significant reflection of this sacred relationship grounded in promises and bonds.⁷

Covenant theology defines the relationship between humanity and God through Jesus Christ in the new covenant, in which all of God’s promises are realized. This is a crucial promise relevant to this research study of God’s commitment to bringing to fruition the work He has initiated in those He has selected. This means that in the new covenant, God will nurture the spiritual growth of His chosen ones through His Son, the Christ Jesus. This intervention did not bring forth the study of covenant theology to its full potential in the lives of Christians and their union with Christ. Questions remain: “How does the Bible convey the principle that spiritual growth is covenantal?” And “How does Christ’s fulfillment of the old covenants ensure spiritual growth?”

⁷ Horton, *God of Promise*, 10.

The efficacy of the ESG intervention hinges on a comprehensive review, including an apologetics assessment and a comparative analysis of other spiritual growth perspectives. While the literature has included a theoretical review, it has not been exhaustive. The researcher posits that Western churches prioritize performance-based sanctification over grace-based sanctification, often citing specific biblical passages to support this approach. Therefore, further research would be warranted to determine the effects of spiritual growth anxiety among other theological perspectives, even non-believers, to expand the Christian perspective.

Final Thoughts

The researcher developed the Embracing Spiritual Growth curriculum to fill a ministry gap identified among members of BrandofMan Ministries. The aim was to help Christians address the anxiety often associated with spiritual growth by emphasizing God's promise of union with His Son, Jesus Christ. The main conclusion drawn from this intervention is that believers should perceive their spiritual growth through the lens of Christ, as Christ Himself emphasized to Peter in Matthew 16. It is noted that the church and all its blessings, including spiritual growth, are founded on the biblical truth that Jesus is the Holy Son of God and nothing else. Therefore, there is a strong connection between what God does to foster believers' spiritual growth and what they do themselves. This is the God-in-you principle of sanctification.

Participants from BrandofMan Ministries gained insight into biblical truths that their spiritual growth is positional through their promised union with Christ. Christ is no longer only an external source of sanctification but an internal source of spiritual growth, not only by definition but also by progression through the power of the Holy Spirit of God. The relevancy of this positional righteousness became evident through the realization that their works of

righteousness are insufficient for sanctification; only the monergistic work of God is capable of making something holy, either by decree or presence.

The ESG curriculum was designed to implement a tri-fold methodology for reducing anxiety and facilitating spiritual growth. This approach included recorded sermons via podcast, in-person teaching sessions, and individual Bible studies. The curriculum aimed to impart biblical knowledge to combat growth anxiety through the believer's covenant union with Christ. It covered topics such as the sovereignty of God, the incarnation of Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the fallen state of mankind, as well as covenant theology, God's union with believers, monergism, the law and gospel distinction, and the biblical concept of rest. Ultimately, ESG emphasized the critical principle of Christianity: It is not about Christians but only about Christ.

The effectiveness of the intervention was measured through qualitative and quantitative data collected from pre- and post-intervention interviews, surveys, and questionnaires. The results demonstrated that the Word of God, delivered through the power of the Holy Spirit, was the primary agent of change.

APPENDIX A
PERMISSION REQUEST

[Date]

Governing Board of Elders
Faith Baptist Church
810 W Carlos St.
Alturas, CA. 96101

Dear Elders,

As a graduate student at John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctorate in Ministry. The title of my research project is Embracing Spiritual Growth. My research aims to teach Christians to understand better and live out their covenant union with Christ to promote confidence and decrease anxiety in spiritual growth.

I request your permission to conduct my research at Faith Baptist Church over ten weeks, covering [dates and times].

All participants must be 18 years of age or older.

An active participant in a Christian church within seventy-five miles of Adin, Ca.

Participants will be asked to:

- Complete the attached consent form.
- Attend a weekly 1-hour teaching series.
- Listen to a weekly thirty-minute podcast sermon.
- Complete a weekly private Bible study at their own pace.
- Attend an introductory and concluding 1-hour meeting.
- Take a pre and post-project survey and questionnaire.
- Respond to a pre and post-project group interview.

All participation is voluntary and anonymous. All the data collected from this project will be used to determine the effectiveness of the project curriculum.

Thank you for considering my request. A permission response document is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Will Hunsaker

PERMISSION REQUEST

[Date]

Governing Board
Lookout Community Church
143 Main St.
Lookout, CA. 96054

Dear board members,

As a graduate student at John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctorate in Ministry. The title of my research project is Embracing Spiritual Growth. My research aims to teach Christians to understand better and live out their covenant union with Christ to promote confidence and decrease anxiety in spiritual growth.

I request your permission to conduct my research at Faith Baptist Church over ten weeks, covering [dates and times].

All participants must be eighteen years of age or older.

An active participant in a Christian church within seventy-five miles of Adin, Ca.

Participants will be asked to:

- Complete the attached consent form.
- Attend a weekly 1-hour teaching series.

- Listen to a weekly thirty-minute podcast sermon.
- Complete a weekly private Bible study at their own pace.
- Attend an introductory and concluding 1-hour meeting.
- Take a pre and post-project survey and questionnaire.
- Respond to a pre and post-project group interview.

All participation is voluntary and anonymous. All the data collected from this project will be used to determine the effectiveness of the project curriculum.

Thank you for considering my request. A permission response document is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Will Hunsaker

APPENDIX B

PERMISSION RESPONSE

[Date]

Will Hunsaker
BrandofMan Ministries
P. O. Box 175
Adin, CA 96006

Dear Mr. Hunsaker:

After carefully reviewing your research proposal, Embracing Spiritual Growth, we have permitted you to conduct your study at the Faith Baptist Church, 810 W. Carlos St., Alturas, CA. 96101, during [dates and times].

Check the following boxes, as applicable:

[[I/We] grant permission for Will Hunsaker to contact potential participants to invite them to participate in his research study.

Sincerely,

Print_____

Sign_____

Governing Board of Elders
Faith Baptist Church

PERMISSION RESPONSE

[Date]

Will Hunsaker
BrandofMan Ministries
P. O. Box 175
Adin, CA 96006

Dear Mr. Hunsaker:

After carefully reviewing your research proposal entitled Embracing Spiritual Growth, we have permitted you to conduct your study at the Lookout Community Church, 143 Main St. Lookout, CA, 96054 during [dates and times].

Check the following boxes, as applicable:

[[I/We] grant permission for Will Hunsaker to contact potential participants to invite them to participate in his research study.

Sincerely,

Print _____

Sign _____

Governing Board Members
Lookout Community Church

APPENDIX C

VERBAL RECRUITMENT

Hello,

My name is Will Hunsaker. As a graduate student at the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am thrilled to be conducting research as part of my Doctor of Ministry degree. My research aims to develop a teaching series for Christians titled 'Embracing Spiritual Growth' to help them understand and live out their covenant union with Christ daily. If you are interested and meet the requirements, I invite you to join my study.

There are only two requirements:

- You need to be eighteen or older.
- An active participant of a Christian church within seventy-five miles of Adin, CA.

The teaching series, Embracing Spiritual Growth, will be offered at two locations: Adin, CA, on Wednesday evenings from 6–7 p.m. and Alturas, CA, on Thursday evenings from 6–7 p.m.

Participants, if willing, will be asked to:

- Attend a weekly 1-hour teaching series.
- Listen to a weekly thirty-minute podcast sermon.
- Complete a weekly private Bible study at their own pace.
- Attend an introductory and concluding 1-hour meeting.
- Take a pre and post-project survey and questionnaire.
- Respond to a pre and post-project group interview.

The program will run for ten consecutive weeks.

All participation will be anonymous, and no personally identifiable information will be collected aside from a contact email or phone number, which will remain confidential. If you are interested, please read and sign my consent form and return it to me. I will contact you with the date and time of our first meeting.

Thank you for considering this opportunity!

APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORM

Title of the Project: Embracing Spiritual Growth

Principal Investigator: Will Hunsaker, Graduate Student, John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, Liberty University.

Invitation to be part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be eighteen or older and active in a Christian church within seventy-five miles of Adin, CA. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to participate in this research.

What is the study about, and why is it being done?

The study aims to empower Christians to embrace their covenant union with Christ, promoting confidence and reducing anxiety in spiritual growth.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

Participants will be asked to:

- Attend a 1-hour introductory meeting where they will complete a pre-program survey and questionnaire and participate in a recorded group interview.
- Listen to eight thirty-minute pre-recorded podcast sermons, one per week for eight weeks.
- Complete eight private Bible study outlines consisting of a biblical reference section with five responsive questions, one per week for eight weeks. This study is self-paced, with an estimated study time of 1 hour, depending on the participant.
- Attend eight 1-hour teaching sessions with a built-in question and answer period, one per week for eight weeks from 6–7 p.m. at two locations (One on Wednesdays and one on Thursdays) for your convenience.
- During the final teaching session, all participants will receive a post-project survey and questionnaire to take with them, complete, and return during the last meeting.
- Attend a 1-hour finalization meeting where they will return the post-project survey and questionnaire and participate in a post-project recorded group interview.

The project is ten weeks, including the introductory and finalization meetings.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

As part of this study, participants can expect to benefit directly by establishing a more profound connection with Christ, facilitating spiritual growth, and reducing anxiety levels. The findings from this study are expected to help participants realize their covenant union with Christ and apply it to their daily lives. This study aims to promote individual spiritual development and emotional well-being, which can lead to a more fulfilling and meaningful life.

In addition, society also benefits from this study by empowering Christians to confidently spread the message of Christ's life and teachings to the world. Through cultivating a deep spiritual connection with Christ, Christians can develop their character and values and radiate them outward to others. This growth also encourages a sense of Christian community, allowing them to bear witness to the grace and truth of God with confidence and conviction.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records and recordings will be stored securely, and only the researcher and the doctoral committee will have access to the documents.

- Participants' responses to surveys and questionnaires will be anonymous.
- All group interviews will be audio-recorded.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in group settings. While discouraged, other group members may share what was discussed with people outside the group.
- Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then deleted. The researcher and his doctoral committee members will have access to these recordings.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University, BrandofMan Ministries, Faith Bible Church, or Lookout Community Church.

If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number in the next paragraph. Should you decide to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from group data, will be destroyed immediately and not included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Will Hunsaker. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Brandon Pugh, at [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered, and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you agree to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

APPENDIX E

SOCIAL MEDIA RECRUITMENT

Attention BrandofMan Subscribers,

I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree at the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University. To fulfill research requirements, I am developing a teaching series called Embracing Spiritual Growth. The series aims to help Christians understand and apply their covenant union with Christ in daily spiritual growth.

I invite you to participate in this innovative study if you are eighteen years or older and actively attend a Christian church within seventy-five miles of Adin, CA. The teaching series will last ten weeks and be offered in Adin, CA, on Wednesday evenings from 6–7 and in Alturas, CA, on Thursday evenings from 6–7.

As a participant, you will receive:

- A weekly thirty-minute podcast sermon
- A weekly 1-hour teaching session
- A weekly personal Bible study outline with responsive questions
- Pre- and post-project group interview
- Pre- and post-project survey and questionnaire

If you are interested in participating and meet the study criteria, please email Will Hunsaker at [REDACTED]. I will then send you information about our first introductory meeting. At the meeting, there will be a participation consent document for you to sign.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

In Christ,

Will Hunsaker

APPENDIX F**WELCOME LETTER**

Greetings!

Dear [Name],

Thank you for your interest in attending the Embracing Spiritual Growth teaching series. This email serves as a friendly reminder about our upcoming introductory meeting.

I am Will Hunsaker, a John W. Rawlings School of Divinity graduate student at Liberty University. I am conducting research as part of my Doctor of Ministry degree requirement. The first meeting will take place on [date] at [time], at [location].

To participate, you will need to:

- Attend all eight weeks of the teaching series.
- Listen to all eight weeks of a podcast sermon.
- Complete eight weekly personal Bible studies and responsive questions.
- Take part in pre and post-group interviews.
- Fill out pre and post-project surveys and questionnaires.

Your participation will be anonymous, and we will not distribute personal identification information. If you are interested in participating, please attend the first introductory meeting and sign the participant consent form (Attached). During this meeting, we will comprehensively explain and overview the project.

I'm looking forward to seeing you there!

Sincerely,
Will Hunsaker

APPENDIX G

SURVEY QUESTIONS

EMBRACING SPIRITUAL GROWTH

I kindly request that you abstain from including any personal identifying information, including your name, on this form. Please be advised that this is a necessary precaution to ensure your privacy is adequately safeguarded and the data remains unbiased. This survey assesses a participant's knowledge and experience of their spiritual growth in a covenant relationship with Christ. Please respond to each statement below by selecting a number from 1 to 5: (1) means **"Strongly Disagree,"** (2) means **"Disagree,"** (3) means **"Neither agree nor disagree,"** (4) means **"Agree,"** and (5) means **"Strongly Agree."** This survey will be collected at the next scheduled meeting.

God and Humans
1) According to the Bible, God is NOT always in complete control. _____
2) God is the source of all holiness. _____
3) Humans are basically good. _____
4) If God promises to do something, He will deliver. _____
5) To grow spiritually, I must be obedient to God. _____
6) All the laws of God must be kept perfectly. _____
Christ and Spirit
1) The Spirit only indwells Christians sometimes. _____
2) The Spirit alone produces spiritual fruit. _____
3) All Christians receive the Holy Spirit forever. _____
4) Jesus created my faith, but I must maintain it. _____
5) Jesus is more committed to my spiritual growth than I am. _____
6) Christ holds together every molecule in existence. _____
7) Jesus taking on a human form made my spiritual growth possible. _____
Union with Christ
1) I have a solid biblical foundation of the meaning of covenant . _____
2) My union with Christ means God is in me. _____
3) My union with Christ is a promise from God. _____
4) My union with Christ involves God doing some work and me doing some work. _____
5) My union with Christ involves both me and the church. _____
6) My union with Christ means I am given every spiritual blessing. _____

Spiritual Growth

- | |
|---|
| 1) I only grow spiritually when I produce spiritual fruit. _____ |
| 2) When God sanctifies something, He makes it holy. _____ |
| 3) I can achieve holiness in several ways. _____ |
| 4) Concerning my spiritual growth, God must first act, and then I must take over. _____ |
| 5) To grow spiritually, I must overcome the desires of the flesh. _____ |
| 6) I am made holy immediately in salvation. _____ |
| 7) To grow spiritually, I must "let go and let God." _____ |

APPENDIX H
QUESTIONNAIRE

EMBRACING SPIRITUAL GROWTH

I kindly request that you abstain from including any personal identifying information, including your name, on this form. Please be advised that this is a necessary precaution to ensure your privacy is adequately safeguarded and the data remains unbiased. Please answer the questions below to the best of your ability. Feel free to use additional paper if necessary. This survey will be administered before and after the Embracing Spiritual Growth course. You should not seek help from external sources or third parties to answer these questions. If unsure, please indicate, "I do not know." This survey will be collected at the next scheduled meeting.

- 1) Please describe in your own words the biblical term covenant. Be specific.

- 2) What is spiritual growth?

- 3) What does it mean when the Bible claims all things have been created through Christ and for Christ?

- 4) What is the biblical principle of the gospel?

- 5) What is the biblical principle of the Law?

- 6) What is the relationship between the Law and the Gospel?

- 7) How does the relationship between the Law and the Gospel affect your spiritual growth?
- 8) How do you know if you are growing spiritually?
- 9) How would you describe your relationship with Christ? Please provide some examples.
- 10) Describe what it means for a believer to be united in Christ.
- 11) What is the significance of a promise from God?
- 12) What role does God play in a believer's spiritual growth?
- 13) What role do you play in your spiritual growth?

APPENDIX I**GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS****EMBRACING SPIRITUAL GROWTH**

- 1) Please describe the importance of spiritual growth.
- 2) What does it mean to grow spiritually?
- 3) What is the purpose of the Christian life?
- 4) How does the Bible describe something becoming holy?
- 5) What does the Bible mean when it says believers are “in Christ” or “in the Lord?”
- 6) Regarding spiritual growth, explain the relationship between God’s actions and your actions.
- 7) What is a biblical covenant?
- 8) Please describe why biblical covenants are essential in the life of a Christian.
- 9) How do you understand the biblical concept that a Christian is a sinner and a saint simultaneously?
- 10) What has been the impact of sin on humanity?

APPENDIX J
INDIVIDUAL BIBLE STUDY QUESTIONS
EMBRACING SPIRITUAL GROWTH

I kindly request that you abstain from including any personal identifying information, including your name, on this form. Please be advised that this is a necessary precaution to ensure your privacy is adequately safeguarded and the data remains unbiased. Please answer the questions below to the best of your ability. Feel free to use additional paper if necessary. This survey will be given out with each private Bible study guide during the Embracing Spiritual Growth course. You should not seek help from external sources or third parties to answer these questions. If unsure, please indicate, “I do not know.” This survey will be collected at the next scheduled meeting.

1. What is the author’s key message in this passage?

2. Why do you think the author included this passage?

3. What does this passage teach you about spiritual growth?

4. What application(s) did you find in this passage?

5. How is this passage important to your union with Christ?

APPENDIX K

TEACHING SERIES

EMBRACING SPIRITUAL GROWTH

This teaching series will offer a comprehensive exploration of the scriptural foundation that underpins the podcast sermon. The focus will be on expository analysis, with an emphasis on explanation. The overarching goal of this in-depth study is to equip participants with a deeper understanding of their covenant union with Christ, ultimately leading to the establishment of a sanctification model.

WEEK ONE

“DO NOT FEAR”

Hebrews 5:11–6:12

Anxiety in spiritual growth and the problems believers have

The warning that takes place in these verses is one of the most intense that appears in the New Testament.

Vince Lombardi. This is a football.

Hebrews context.

- Author is unknown
- This is a series of sermons to Jewish Christians. These Jewish Christians are having a crisis of faith, so they are returning to a works-based righteousness in combination with a grace-based righteousness. These Jewish Christians have become anxious.
- The central theme is the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus.
- In the text, Jesus’ supremacy and sufficiency are reflected in his being the final word, more significant than angels, our great high priest, and our Sabbath rest. Essentially, the author is stating that Jesus fulfills all things.

Concerning him, we have much to say, and *it is* hard to explain since you have become dull of hearing.

Hebrews 5:11

- The author has been discussing all this, but he feels that a pause is necessary to revisit basic concepts.
 - Probably referring to the Melchizedek discussion.
 - *Dull of hearing* parallels a statement from 2:1, **“For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it.”**

- Why have they become dull of hearing?
 - Tempted to return to what they knew before.
 - Anytime we think of contributing to salvation, we become dull.
 - The author is dealing with a group having second thoughts. Anxiety is setting in because nothing is happening. Christ has not returned. Their lives are getting worse through persecution.
 - Did we make a mistake? Do we need to hedge our bet? Do we need to see the priests?

It is interesting how the author put this.

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who, because of practice, have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

Hebrews 5:12–14

- They were not new converts, *you ought to be teachers.*
- They need to be reminded of the basics: *you have come to need milk.*
- They should be those who teach the things of God, *elementary principles of the oracles of God.*
 - These texts show that knowledge is a critical component (often ridiculed today)
 - What are these principles?
 - All statements from God. We know from Luke that all God has said points to Jesus.
 - This is what drives a lot of spiritual growth anxiety today. Not knowing the basics.

Then, beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

Luke 24:27

- The author continues with specifics.
- I have a lot to say about the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus, but I cannot continue until we understand the basics.

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who, because of practice, have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

Hebrews 5:12–14

- Their faith has been shaken. The author puts these believers back into the milk-Christian category. They believe in God, but they have forgotten the promise. So, they must return to the basics.
- What is this “word of righteousness?”

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.¹³ For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant.¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, who, because of practice, have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

Hebrews 5:12–14

- Immediately, Christians today think of things they are to do. God’s teachings of how to be righteous before Him.
- NOPE. If we stay with the context of Hebrews, the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ, then the word of righteousness is THE WORD BY WHICH RIGHTEOUSNESS IS DELIVERED. Which is JESUS CHRIST.
- Not understanding that our entire righteousness is bound up in Christ leads to a failure of everything else. Then anxiety develops in our spiritual growth. We focus on what we do instead of what has been done for us in Christ.
- Using the phrase infant fits the illustration that the child must precede the adult. Adults cannot be sustained by milk alone. We must get the gospel right for everything past this principle to work.
- The gospel is... (1 Cor 15:1–8)

Therefore, leaving the elementary teaching about Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits.

Hebrews 6:1–3

- The author lays out an interesting set of subjects that compose *elementary teaching*.
 - Dead works represent useless exercises to attain or maintain righteousness.
 - Faith in God is the foundation.
 - Washing and laying on hands were sacramental and expressions of grace.

- Resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment are matters of Christian glorification.
- All basic principles for the milk-Christian.
- The point is not to abandon these truths but to set them as the foundation of faith.
- By the way, these were all the things the priests and scribes would challenge Jesus.
- If we want to go beyond the basics of Christ. We must keep Christ at the center of everything, so we do not have to discuss such things.

Therefore, leaving the elementary teaching about Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits.

Hebrews 6:1–3

- What is this repentance? *Metanoia* means to change direction, not to confess.
- Specifically, change your direction from what will not make you righteous before God.
- Combining our works with God's grace will not save you. All works for salvation and their effects are dead.

Then, we have a clear monergistic statement.

Therefore, leaving the elementary teaching about Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits.

Hebrews 6:1–3

- This simple statement has significant implications. The believer's ability to be a milk Christian, let alone move on to a solid food Christian, is predicated on God's permission.
- That is critical to addressing anxiety in spiritual growth. You might want to write this verse down and stick it on your refrigerator.

Now, the big Kahuna. This is what twists up the guts of many Christians, so get out the antacids.

This is the specific apostasy section.

For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit and have tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the age to come, and *then* have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.

Hebrews 6:4–6

- First of all, who is the author talking about?
- These are particular conditions describing a Christian.

Then comes V6 ... OMG

For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit and have tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the age to come, and *then* have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.

Hebrews 6:4–6

This is why many scholars think these are sermons. This verse is meant to motivate believers.

George Patton was famous for saying, “I do not like paying for the same real estate twice.”

This verse has a similar tone.

- We have to keep the context correct. We are looking at the author preaching the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ to Jewish Christians who are adding many of their old practices to Christianity.
- What kind of examples does Scripture give us about believers falling away and coming back? All positive ones.
 - Peter, David, Samson, parables (The prodigal son, lost sheep, lost coins, etc.), the nation of Israel.
 - So if we read this (as many do) as it is impossible for a Christian who has fallen away to be redeemed again, then we ignore the grand narrative of Scripture.
- Does this verse say a Christian can fall away? You bet.
- Does this verse say it is impossible to come back? Absolutely not.
- What is impossible is for a Christian to include works with God’s grace for the effects of salvation.
- Does this verse say a Christian cannot attain all righteousness through Christ and in our works? Yes, it does.

For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit and have tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the age to come, and *then* have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.

Hebrews 6:4–6

- The point being emphasized is the human desire to captain their own ship and how that desire will create anxiety as they strive for righteousness on their own, thereby compromising the work of Christ.
 - As long as we are hedging our bets on righteousness, there is no repentance (no change).
 - This is an insult to Christ.
 - All falling away from faith mentioned in the Bible has to do with adding something to the work of Christ. Apostasy in the Bible is always referred to in this way.
 - *No one knows how bad they are until they try to be good.*
C. S. Lewis.
 - If we are going to be righteous before God, it will not be based on what we do.
 - These verses do not discuss how we can be better Christians. Instead, they discuss a believer's rejection of the work of Christ.
- The following verses illustrate the people who have forgotten the basics.

For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled receives a blessing from God; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.

Hebrews 6:7–8

- This is a lot like the parable of the sower of seeds.
But the author is not giving up on these Jews with shaken faith. There is still hope.

But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way. ¹⁰ For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.

Hebrews 6:9–10

- We are completely assured that Christ is enough, so we do not hedge our bets on other things.
 - This includes the things that accompany salvation: Justification, righteousness, sanctification, and glorification).
- The basis of Christianity is Christ. He is the center of all things, including any good thing we do.

I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

John 15:5

However, the author of Hebrews indicates that God still cares about what His people do.

But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way. For God is not unjust so as

to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.

Hebrews 6:9–10

- *Christians are doers of the word, not just hearers only.*
James 1:22
- However, Christians' work, love, and ministry toward His name do not belong to us. They belong to the gospel, from which we receive all that accompanies salvation. We all show diligence and the full assurance of hope because we do not earn God's promises; we inherit them.

And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Hebrews 6:11–12

A summary of these verses.

Can you learn to receive and not earn?

You will serve, love, and minister, but do so as one who receives, not works.

Remember this when you look at your performance to determine your spiritual growth.

WEEK TWO “BIBLICAL FOOTINGS”

Part I: God is Holy and Sovereign

- Why is this important to spiritual growth?
 - I will use spiritual growth and sanctification interchangeably.
 - Spiritual growth is a practical term, and sanctification is a theological term. Holiness is an attribute of God that is essential to sanctification.
- The word sanctification combines two Latin words: “make holy.”
 - This is supported by the original languages of the Old and New Testaments.
 - The Hebrew word for holy is *qodesh*, meaning a sacred place or thing.
 - In Greek, the word is *hagios*, also meaning sacred or holy, with an emphasis on being separated from sin and consecrated to God.
- God is the source of holiness.
 - The Bible repeatedly and emphatically teaches that God is holy.
 - Leviticus provides an overarching statement as God instructs the Israelites through Moses on how to act and not to act.

- God sets the standard for what is and is not holy.

“You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy.”

Leviticus 19:2 NASB

- As He is the first cause of all things, **“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth”** (Gen 1:1 NASB), then He is the source of holiness.
- The Bible tells us that God makes things holy in two ways: His decree or His presence.
 - By decree, God declared the seventh day the sabbath day and made it holy (Gen 2:3).
 - By His presence, the ground around Him became holy, as depicted in Exodus 3:1–6 with Moses and the burning bush.
- Sovereignty is another critical attribute of God in our covenant union with Christ in sanctification.
 - God’s sovereignty is intrinsic to His nature overall.
 - He is omnipotent, having unlimited power, saying to Abraham, “I am God Almighty” (Gen 17:1 NASB).
 - He is omniscient, having unlimited knowledge, “Great is our Lord and abundant in strength. His understanding is infinite” (Ps 147:5 NASB).
 - He is omnipresent, being fully present in all places, always, at the same time.

“Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. *If I take up the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, Even there, Your hand will lead me, And Your right hand will take hold of me.*”

Psalm 139:7–10

- The most critical aspect of God’s sovereignty is His immutability.
 - He never changes. Consequently, there is never a time when God is not sovereign.

“For I, the Lord, do not change.”

Malachi 3:6

Takeaways:

- God is sovereign, controlling all things.
- God is the source and standard of holiness.

Part II The Incarnation of Christ

Theologians use incarnation to indicate that God came in human flesh as Jesus Christ, affirming His humanity.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us; and we saw His glory, glory as of the only *Son* from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:14

Why is the incarnation of Jesus Christ foundational to our spiritual growth?

One of my favorite biblical accounts of Jesus comes from Luke 5, where a paralyzed man is lowered through the roof of the house where Jesus taught. The room was packed with people wanting to hear Jesus and see miracles. Now, everyone in this house was watching this and expected Jesus to say, you are healed. Instead, Jesus says, your sins are forgiven. The Jewish religious leaders freaked out; who are you to forgive sins? Jesus answers, what is easier, to say get up and walk or your sins are forgiven? Jesus is making things very clear to the Pharisees: This is why I am here, to forgive sins. All this other stuff is to fulfill prophecy and validate the message. Jesus had to come in the flesh to atone for fleshly sin, and His death, resurrection, and ascension would prompt the sending of the Holy Spirit upon all who believe.

- The entire plan of redemption revolves around the incarnation.
 - No incarnation, no manger
 - No manger, no cross
 - No cross, no atonement
 - No atonement, no justification
 - No justification, no union with Christ
- This is a miraculous event that did not come out of nowhere. We see this throughout redemptive history. It is a pattern God was determined to work in.
 - God chose to become flesh and walk with us.
 - He always works in insignificant ways.
 - No one thought that God would interact this way. Again, this is not new. Even in Genesis, there is a prophecy of the incarnation, as Adam and Eve were created in the image of God. Thousands of years later, God takes on this very image of Himself.
- So Christ did not assume the image of mankind; they were created as a likeness of Him.
- There are other instances as well.
 - The Old Testament angel of the Lord often takes the appearance of a man, sometimes without others even knowing it. They think He is an average Jew.
 - These are shadows of the coming incarnation.
- The beauty of the incarnation is that God desires intimacy with His people.
 - The garden of Eden
 - The tabernacle
 - The temple.
 - Jesus Christ
- Jesus Christ is all of humanity compressed into one and fulfills all the perfection God had intended.
- The significance of our union with the incarnate Christ directly affects our spiritual growth.

- Without the incarnation, there would be no union with Christ.
- Christ is united to all of humanity in the incarnation.

The incarnation opens up the understanding of the Old Testament as all the promises of God are fulfilled.

For as many as the promises of God are, in Him they are yes; therefore, through Him also is our Amen to the glory of God through us.

2 Corinthians 1:20

I cannot help but recall the encounter between Simeon and the infant Jesus when Mary and Joseph brought Him to the temple by Jewish Law. The priest Simeon, whom God had informed that he would not die before seeing the Lord's Christ, was present. When he held Jesus in his arms, Simeon said,

**“Now, Lord, You are letting Your bond-servant depart in peace,
According to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation,
Which You have prepared in the presence of all the peoples:
A light for revelation for the gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel.”**

Luke 2:29–32

- The incarnation brings us closer to God.
 - The coming of Christ into our world has brought us closer to God, forging a personal connection that transcends time and space.
 - The words of the apostle John remind us of the transformative power of encountering God in the flesh (John 1:14–18).

The incarnation of Christ compels us to spiritual growth.

For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that those who live would no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose on their behalf.

2 Corinthians 5:14–15

True godliness is lived out in a loving union with Christ.

- The entirety of the incarnation is the greatest manifestation of God's love, and knowing Christ ensures that he will change us.

Takeaway

- The incarnation of Christ is central and essential to the Christian faith.
- Only through the incarnation is a union with Christ realized through the power of the Spirit.

Part III: The Power of the Holy Spirit

First, we should establish the origin of the Holy Spirit's power. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the triune God and thus has the same divine attributes as God.

“But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men, but to God.”

Acts 5:3–4

The Spirit's power has been on full display throughout Scripture. His power is seen in creation.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was a formless and desolate emptiness, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters” (Genesis 1:1–2).

His power is seen in bringing men to do God's will, as at the anointing of David by Samuel,

“So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David from that day forward. And Samuel set out and went to Ramah.”

1 Samuel 16:13

His power is seen in the ministry of Jesus, filling Him with the Spirit (Luke 4:1), leading Him (Luke 4:14), and casting out demons (Matt12:28)

His power was promised to come upon Christians permanently,

I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, so that He may be with you forever; *the Helper is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it does not see Him or know Him; but you know Him because He remains with you and will be in you.*

John 14:16–17

- The Holy Spirit was sent in fulfillment of God's promise through Jesus Christ to permanently indwell believers (Eph 1:13).
 - The persistent presence of God and the full sanctification of the believer not only symbolize the ongoing work of the Spirit in setting a believer apart as holy but also for the purpose of benefiting others.
 - Christ carries out all aspects of His work within believers, using the power of the Spirit to sanctify them.

- When spiritual fruit manifests in the life of a believer, it should be recognized as the fruit of the Spirit rather than the individual's own achievement.
- The role of the Spirit in sanctification is evident in several ways.
 - The Spirit's role in restraining and regenerating believers by steering them away from carnal desires and towards God's will leads to the manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit as outlined in Galatians 5:16–26.
 - 1 Thessalonians 1:6 highlights the role of the Spirit as a comforter in the progression of believers by offering solace during difficult circumstances.
 - The Spirit operates in the admonishment of believers and non-believers to bear witness to Christ and to bring conviction of sin.
 - Just to mention a few.
- How is this helpful in addressing anxiety experienced during spiritual growth?
 - Measuring performance to gauge growth is a fundamental source of stress in sanctification.
 - Make no mistake, believers are performing, but their performance is rooted in their union with Christ and not the cause of it.

Takeaway

- Christ works within believers through the power of the Spirit.

Part IV: Humanity has fallen

The Bible teaches us that humanity has no hope of spiritual growth outside of a covenantal union with Christ. This is because of the sinful condition we inherited from the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. In the first part of Romans 5, Paul speaks prominently about the substitutionary atoning death of Christ; then, in V. 12, he tells us why,

“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all mankind, because all sinned.”

Romans 5:12

The apostle John uses the theme of darkness to refer to the condition of man in contrast to Christ as the Light,

“In Him was life, and the life was the Light of mankind. And the Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not grasp it.”

John 1:4–5

Martin Luther's commentary on Romans 7 indicates that Paul was writing about “Simul justus et peccator,” often called “The Simul” in theological circles. The phrase refers to the simultaneous identity of Christians as both saints and sinners. Despite being justified as saints,

Christians are still prone to sinning. Even when they intend to do good, they often do something wrong. He used himself as an example,

“I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully agree with the Law of God in the inner person, but I see a different Law in the parts of my body waging war against the Law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the Law of sin, *the Law* which is in my body’s parts.”

Romans 7:21–23

A fundamental aspect of our covenant union with Christ and spiritual growth is comprehending the biblical concept of humanity’s fallen state. Without understanding how our nature is contrasted to God, we cannot fully grasp and apply the work of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit to our spiritual growth.

Conclusion

- To understand and apply a covenant union with Christ to spiritual growth, we must begin with four footings: God, Jesus, The Holy Spirit, and Humanity. These footings serve as the foundation for our growth. While the principles conveyed for each footing are not exhaustive, they were developed to help us embrace spiritual growth.

Application points:

- Holiness can only come from what is naturally holy.
- God is always in control.
- Jesus is God; thus, He has all the power and authority of God.
- The power of the Holy Spirit dwells in all Christians and is the action behind spiritual growth.
- Our fallen state makes it impossible to grow spiritually on our own.

WEEK THREE

“COVENANT FOUNDATIONS”

Covenant Foundation

This teaching series will focus on how a believer’s union with Christ is covenantal and why that is important to spiritual growth.

Our text today is Hebrews 9:11–22

- Luke 22:20 tells us that Jesus delivered a **“New Covenant in His blood.”**
 - In the context of Near Eastern culture, a covenant was a legal and binding agreement often articulated using the Greek phrases *syntheke* (the binding of

things together) or *diatheke* (irrevocable agreement) which often applied to a last will and testament. These words were translations of the Hebrew word *berit* which signifies a bond. A *berit* was often sealed or affirmed by blood.

- There were several covenants within the Old Testament.
 - Conditional covenants were focused on works or performance and had requirements attached for fulfillment.
 - Unconditional covenants were founded, maintained, and fulfilled strictly by grace. These had no requirements.
 - Example of a conditional covenant. The sacrificial system established under the Mosaic covenant was conditional, requiring specific sacrifices in order to receive blessings. Even within the imperatives, there were additional conditions, such as the requirements for grain offerings detailed in Leviticus 2. These offerings had to be salted for flavor and free from leavening agents. It was also part of the provisions for the Levitical priests, and in Numbers 18:19, it is referred to as “An everlasting covenant of salt.”
 - Example of an unconditional covenant. Unconditional covenants, also known as covenants of grace, are exemplified in Genesis 3:15, where God unconditionally promises to send a descendant of Eve to counteract the impact of Satan’s actions in the garden. This covenant is made with no attached conditions, ensuring that the promised descendant will come regardless of any other circumstances.
- A Blood covenant has the highest level of significance, and it is how God sealed his promises of salvation to His people.
- This sealing in blood was a guarantee that God would keep His promise.
 - This is always accomplished through sacrifice as illustrated in the following covenants.
 - Noahic (Gen 8:20–22)
 - Abrahamic (Gen 15:8–10)
 - Mosaic (Exod 24:1–8)
 - Davidic (2 Sam 7:1–29; Rev 1:5)
 - New Covenant (Luke 22:20)
- Christ brought the New Covenant promised in Jeremiah 31:31–32, which fulfilled the covenant of grace established by God in Genesis 3:15.

“Behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah,³² not like the covenant which I made with their fathers on the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke. . . .”

Jeremiah 31:31–32

And I will make enemies. Of you and the woman, And of your offspring and her Descendant; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise Him on the heel.”

Genesis 3:15

All covenants are guaranteed and were often sealed by the blood of animal sacrifice. However, the New Covenant that seals a believer’s union with Christ is an unconditional covenant sealed with the blood of God.

Theme I: The Great High Priest is Covenantal (Heb 9:11–12).

The function of a Priest was to speak on behalf of mankind to God.

- The author immediately explains Christ’s special function under the New Covenant.
 - Take note of the word beginning verse 11, “but.”
 - This is significant because Hebrews 9:1–10 specifically discussed the Law of the Old Covenant.
 - The author is emphasizing that Christ brings a new and better covenant.

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; ¹² and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

Hebrews 9:11–12

Another significant word is “appeared.”

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; ¹² and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

Hebrews 9:11–12

The incarnation of Christ as a high priest signified the realization of God’s plan of redemption. Which was a promise made in eternity past (Eph 1 and Isa 53).

For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it back. ¹⁸ No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it back. This commandment I received from My Father.”

John 10:17–18

Christ’s new covenant entered through the heavenly tabernacle.

- The earthly tabernacle was patterned after the heavenly. Christ's work in the incarnation was based on covenant.
- The function of the high priest was assigned under the Mosaic covenant.
- The structure and function of the Tabernacle were instituted under the Mosaic covenant.

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; ¹² and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

Hebrews 9:11–12

- Jesus' work as the high priest took Him further than the earthly priests could go.
 - Levitical priests were instructed under the Mosaic covenant.
 - The High Priest could only go as far as the Holy of Holies in the earthly Tabernacle through blood animal sacrifice.
 - Again, the sacrificial system was established under the Mosaic covenant.
 - However, Jesus moved through the heavenly Holy of Holies using His blood.
 - Our union with Christ can only come through His blood sacrifice.
 - A blood sacrifice was a covenant requirement.

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; ¹² and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

Hebrews 9:11–12

- This entrance by Jesus was “one time, for all time.”
 - The New Covenant, through Jesus, fulfilled all the previous covenants.
 - As we are unified with Christ, we have fulfilled all the covenants.
 - Believers are sanctified and are being sanctified not by our works but in a covenant union with Christ.

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; ¹² and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

Hebrews 9:11–12

- This shows Christ's sufficiency in our spiritual growth and grounds our confidence in our union with Him.
 - He not only fulfills the priestly duty of a blood sacrifice but does so with His own blood.

- This was a final act of absolute redemption (Once for all) instead of a continual act.
 - Once we are made holy in Christ, we will not be made unholy.

- We are made holy through the presence of God in us.
- This is a critical point for those trapped in performance righteousness.

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; ¹² and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

Hebrews 9:11–12

Our union with Christ is covenantal because He is the Great High Priest.

- Christ brought a new covenant through the sacrifice of His blood.
- He is the High Priest, Tabernacle, and Temple through His blood.
- The Blood of Jesus brought the final and everlasting covenant.
- In Christ, all the covenants are fulfilled.

Theme II: The sacrifice of Christ is covenantal (Hebrews 9:13–14).

- Under the Mosaic Covenant, approaching God required ritual cleansing, even for high priests.
 - However, the inner person was never cleansed.
 - The sacrifice of Christ is a deep cleaning.
 - Through the new covenant, the sacrifice of Christ cleanses deep into our inner being, even our inner thoughts.
 - Because we are in Christ, and He is in us.

For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, ¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Hebrews 9:13–14

- The last line is critical to spiritual growth anxiety.
 - What exactly are dead works?
 - Any work that would add to the work of Christ.
 - The author spoke of this very thing in Hebrews 5:11–6:12.
 - Essentially, when we attach anything we do to what Christ has done concerning the things that accompany salvation (spiritual growth).
- Hebrews says that Christ has cleansed our conscience through the new covenant from having to earn our sanctification.
- What does it mean to be cleansed from dead works?
 - We no longer have the weight of sin condemning us.

For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh,¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Hebrews 9:13–14

Summary: The Sacrifice of Christ is Covenantal

- We can only stand before God clean both inside and out.
- The sacrifice of Christ cleanses believers in all ways.
- All works for spiritual growth are dead works.
- We are free from dead works in Christ.

Theme III: Mediator of a new covenant.

- Mediator can be a dangerous word.
 - Often, we think of it as someone who gets between two opposing sides to reach a compromise.
 - For example, diplomats attempt to hash out an agreement to avoid escalating trouble between the U.S. and China. A mediator would find common ground between the two countries.
- We must remember who God is (sovereign and holy) and who humanity is (fallen, sinful, and corrupt).
 - In this context, there is no common ground to negotiate.

For this reason, He is the mediator of a new covenant so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

Hebrews 9:15

- The author shows that the work of Christ agrees that mankind is lost, fallen, and depraved. There is no compromise possible. So, a sacrifice must be made to redeem humanity.
 - Again, this is a covenant act.
 - A sacrifice is required for redemption.
- It is the same with our spiritual growth (A fruit of salvation); any sacrifice we make will be insufficient. Only the sacrifice of Christ is sufficient for our spiritual growth.
 - There is no need for stress in performance-based spiritual growth because the only work that applies is His.
 - Christ is doing the verbs.

For this reason, He is the mediator of a new covenant so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

Hebrews 9:15

- Then, we receive even more covenant language from the author.
 - He emphasizes that the things that accompany salvation are covered under the work of Christ in the New Covenant.
 - And given to His people (those called) to receive the promise (covenant) of eternity with Him.
 - Again, stressing that the union we have with Christ is covenantal.
 - It is unconditional. We cannot earn this covenant promise; we only receive it.

For this reason, He is the mediator of a new covenant so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

Hebrews 9:15

Summary: Mediator of a New Covenant

- **Christ acts as a mediator by providing Himself as a sacrifice.**
- **The Old Covenant could not secure sanctification through works.**
- **The New Covenant secures our sanctification in Christ.**
- **Christ is the mediator to those called to receive the covenant promise.**

Theme IV: The Greater Blood of the New Covenant

- The author begins to show how Christ achieved our sanctification.
 - He draws a parallel between a covenant and a last will and testament (covenant).
 - Just as a last will and testament designates gifts for beneficiaries after a person's passing, Christ's passing brings blessings for those selected to be part of the new covenant.

For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. ¹⁷ For a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives.

Hebrews 9:16–17

- Verse 18 draws the reader to Exodus 24:4–8 (Old Covenant), sprinkling the blood from sacrificed animals to seal the covenant between God and His people.
- V. 19 adds more detail that the people and the written Law were sprinkled with blood, thus inaugurating them as people of the covenant (V20).

Therefore, even the first covenant was not inaugurated without blood. ¹⁹ For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, ²⁰ saying, “This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded you.”

Hebrews 9:18–20

- In these last two verses, the author adds that the tabernacle and all the priestly items were sprinkled with the covenant’s blood.
- The concluding V. 22 addresses the significance of the blood sacrifice in both the old and new covenants.
- This is the heart of a covenant with God; it begins with blood for redemption.
- A believer’s union with Christ is a blood covenant.
- We worship a crucified Lord.

And in the same way he sprinkled both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry with the blood. ²² And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.

Hebrews 9:21–22

- Today’s Christian community is fond of presenting a personal relationship with Christ without testifying to what took place for that to happen.
- Our union with Christ is impossible without His blood sacrifice, which fulfills a covenant between God and mankind.

Summary

Why do we consider our union with Christ covenantal?

- He is the great high priest.
- He is the final blood sacrifice.
- He is the fulfillment of God’s covenants.

How does this truth anchor our sanctification in Him?

- Christ’s blood sacrifice went beyond outward cleansing by purifying the inner person one time for all time.
- Christ’s sacrifice was an unconditional promise that defies our understanding of forgiveness and love.
- It is foolish to think we can compromise with God in any way.

WEEK FOUR

“UNION”

Union

So far, we have examined the biblical perspective of anxiety and applied that to our sanctification. We have laid the groundwork for a covenant union with Christ in addressing spiritual growth anxiety through God’s sovereignty and holiness, the incarnation, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the fallen state of mankind. We also looked at how critical it is to know that our union with Christ is covenantal. Today, we will look at this union through a vital exposition and explanation of Ephesians 1:1–14.

Quick context

- Author: The apostle Paul, while in a Roman prison.
- Audience: It was sent to a collection of Ephesus churches to all those in Christ.
- A circular letter
- Central theme: gospel summary and implications. Specific to this teaching session is our union with Christ.
- Immediately, we learn some critical things from Paul’s introduction.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,

To the saints who are at Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 1:1–2

- We learn that Paul is all for Christ by God’s will. This sets the tone for addressing spiritual growth anxiety through our union with Christ.
 - God is the vine; Paul is the branch.
- We learn this is written to saints (Those sanctified through Christ).
 - This has an OT background.
 - This term refers to the “holy ones” of the OT (Qadosh).
 - They were set apart as holy, much like the Tabernacle, temple, and sabbath, for the service of God.
 - This is critical to our purpose in addressing anxiety in sanctification because sanctification means to be set apart as holy.
 - Thus, saints are people sanctified by God.
- We also learn that the faithful are in Christ.
 - The phrase “in Christ” will be used eleven times in this letter, which is Paul’s preferred way of referring to Christians.
 - It has a deep meaning: not only do the faithful believe in Christ, but their entire lives are in Christ, and He is in them, like a root in soil.
 - Again, this is a critical component of how we view our spiritual growth.
 - Christ is the root of all spiritual growth.

Verses 3–14 are one long sentence in Greek. So, as we look through these verses, we understand that they are all connected.

Verse 3 provides a fundamental principle for spiritual growth.

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ,

Ephesians 1:3

- Christians are those “in Christ” and blessed (not will be blessed) with every spiritual blessing in heaven.
 - This means that all Christians have inherited the promise of eternal life, set apart as Holy to God, and given faith.
 - In terms of our sanctification, all Christ accomplished is present in us.
 - Incarnation: God and humanity joined in the flesh (Covenant of redemption).
 - Crucifixion: Cleansed of the effects of sin.
 - Imputation: Transfers His righteousness to us.
- The one who provided this union with Christ is God, by His grace, through the blood of the covenant.
Paul makes the same point in Colossians,

“In Him, you have been made complete.”

Col. 2:10

What are these blessings? The rest of the paragraph unfolds them.

Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

Ephesians 1:4–6

- In the pre-creation eternity, God elected us to be united with Christ.
 - In doing so, we are considered sanctified in His sight.
- The doctrine of election is critical to our spiritual growth.
 - It is a covenant promise (Covenant of Redemption).
 - It reveals that while we do indeed choose Christ with our free will.
 - It is only because God had already chosen us in eternity past.
 - It is a mystery, but nevertheless, a biblical truth.
 - Similarly, we freely choose to come to Christ only because God had already elected us. Our union with Christ was pre-ordained.
 - This understanding underscores the sovereignty of God and the importance of His role in our spiritual growth.
- Do we then contribute to our spiritual growth?

- Yes, 100 percent.
- But only because in eternity past, God had first deemed us holy and blameless before Him.
- Remember, our union with Christ is not a license to sin but an incentive to holiness.
 - Christians are chosen to set us apart as holy (sanctification).

What have we learned?

- Saints are those set apart as holy before God.
- All saints are in union with Christ.
- All who are in union with Christ have inherited the accomplishments of Christ.
- God chose all who are in union with Christ in eternity past.
- Christians were chosen to be sanctified.

It is only those in union with Christ that can say,

In Him, we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished on us.

Ephesians 1:7–8

In union with Christ

- We have redemption through the blood covenant.
 - Cleansing of the effects of sin
 - All in the fullness of God's grace (No performance necessary)
 - Not in small amounts but poured out in a flood (deluge)
- However, there is a future aspect to our union with Christ.

In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention, which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, *that is*, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth.

Ephesians 1:9–10

Again, notice who is doing all the verbs. God.

- Our union with Christ is moving toward the mystery of His will.
 - What is this mystery?
 - Those in Christ are enlightened with an understanding of His purpose.
 - His purpose is to redeem His elect through Christ.
- The “**summing up of all things**” means to merge all things.

- When time once again joins eternity to merge heaven and earth.
 - We see this in the incarnation.
 - A foundational principle in our union with Christ.
- This merging has significant implications for addressing the anxiety often experienced in spiritual growth.
- Believers are given the mystery of eternity through a union with Christ.
 - God intends that all those in Christ will share eternity with Him.

What we have learned.

- We are already sanctified in union with Christ.
- We have received a flood of God's grace in union with Christ.
- All things (heaven and earth) come together in Christ.
- All are given the mystery of eternity in union with Christ.

Again, we immediately read of the sovereign power of God in our union with Christ.

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God's own* possession, to the praise of His glory.

Ephesians 1:11–14

We also read that our union with Christ is a blessing because we are God's people.

This is another place where Paul stresses the OT, the covenantal aspect of being chosen in Christ. The Jews are the first to hope in Christ.

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God's own* possession, to the praise of His glory.

Ephesians 1:11–14

Then Paul includes the gentiles (Everyone else).

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God's own* possession, to the praise of His glory.

Ephesians 1:11–14

- The union with Christ is emphasized. . . *after*,
 - Listening to the gospel (The gospel is about Jesus, not us.)
 - Believing (A gift from God)
 - Sealing the union with Christ with the Spirit
 - The Spirit of Promise is a bond (new covenant promise) initiated by Jesus (John 14:16–17).

I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, so that He may be with you forever; *the Helper is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it does not see Him or know Him; but you know Him because He remains with you and will be in you.*

John 14:16–17

This emphasizes that this is a covenant union.

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God's own* possession, to the praise of His glory.

Ephesians 1:11–14

- Again, given as a promise (pledge) of our union with Christ (inheritance).
 - It is the Holy Spirit that brings believers to their final inheritance.
- Finally, we see a beautiful phrase, **“To the praise of His glory.”**

This sums up how and why we are in union with Christ.

- How did we come into union with Christ?
 - According to His purpose.
- What is the purpose of God?

“This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.”

John 6:29

- Why?
 - To the praise of His glory
- Therefore, everything we do in our lives as Christians is in Christ.
 - In Him, we have obtained our inheritance.
 - It comes from God and returns to God, *To the praise of His glory*.
 - It does not come from us, nor is it for us.
 - All the effects of our salvation are *To the praise of His glory*.
 - This includes our spiritual growth. No anxiety is necessary.
- Yet, mankind is forever entangled in the false confidence of their own will and the praise of their glory.
 - This is a breeding ground for anxiety in spiritual growth.
 - When obedience to Christ becomes the measure of our spiritual growth, we will always come short.
- Yet, when dependency on Christ is the foundation of our sanctification, we will never be disappointed, and obedience will take care of itself.

Read Luke 18:9–17

Summary

- All blessings for spiritual growth are received in union with Christ.
- Our sanctification is complete in Christ.
- Our sanctification is predestined in Christ.
- If we measure our spiritual growth by obedience, we will always come short.

WEEK FIVE

“GOD-IN-YOU”

God-In-You

- The concept of God’s presence in believers is remarkable, but it can be challenging to comprehend.
 - Many people base their happiness and contentment in their Christian life based on external factors beyond their control.
 - This makes it challenging to experience contentment in spiritual growth that is consistent and reliable.
 - When it comes to spiritual growth, Christians often seek satisfaction in measurable performance or favorable circumstances.

- However, according to the Bible, spiritual growth is not dependent on chance or circumstance.
- It is rooted in the belief that everything is okay between the believer and God, regardless of what is happening.
- This assurance arises from the understanding that God is within us through Jesus Christ. God is in you.

Today, we will study this principle throughout Paul's Epistle to the Philippians.

Paul finishes his letter to the Philippians with a short series of greetings, as is his custom, calling upon them to,

“Greet every saint in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 4:21

- This is fitting because saints are those set apart to serve God.
 - Not because they live holy lives but because Christ is in them, and they are in Him.
 - This is significant when we look at our spiritual growth based on performance.
 - You are already sanctified as God-in-You.
 - You cannot sanctify yourself anymore. You can only live out your sanctification.
- Paul says that believers are,

“Filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, for the glory and praise of God.”

Philippians 1:11

- The significance of being in Christ is a crucial theme in Paul's letter to the Philippians.
- We are in Christ whether we live or die.
 - The point here in spiritual growth is it doesn't matter what the circumstances are; God is in you.
 - This should go a long way with anxiety caused by performance-based spiritual growth.
 - Good or bad circumstances. Obedience or disobedience. Christians will be sanctified according to God's will and not their efforts.

According to my eager expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but *that* with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

Philippians 1:20

- The first part of this verse emphasizes the covenant aspect of God-in-you.
 - The implication here is that Paul's union with Christ is based on what God promised.

According to my eager expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but *that* with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

Philippians 1:20

Paul's very life was based on His union with Christ.

“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

Philippians 1:22

The God-in-you principle gives hope that God will finish what He has begun in us.

- God-in-you began His work when you believed
 - Definitive sanctification.
 - One time for all time, made holy and righteous before God through Christ.
 - Progressive sanctification
 - God-in-you will continue to grow you spiritually until Christ returns.
 - This growth has very little to do with you and everything to do with God.
 - Growth will be according to His will.

“For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work among you will complete it by the day of Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 1:6

Consequently, we live lives blessed through a union with Christ.

Two factors come into play here in spiritual growth.

- First, our fallen condition of selfishness or empty conceit directs us to focus on performance-based spiritual growth, leading to anxiety.
- Second, humility is necessary for faith-based spiritual growth.
 - Specifically suited for the kingdom.
 - We see this emphasized as the Christian character in the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3–5).
 - Since we are in Christ, who humbled Himself to make peace between God and mankind, we assume His characteristics.

God-in-You encourages believers to be humble, just as Christ is humble.

“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility consider one another as more important than yourselves.”

Philippians 2:3

The God-in-you principle encourages us to pursue spiritual growth in reverence of God (Dependency then obedience).

- This cuts to the matter of spiritual growth anxiety.
 - What is the relationship between what God does (His sovereignty) and what we do (human action)?
 - Is it God-not-You, God-then-You, God-plus-You, or something else?
 - Does God do everything for my spiritual growth, and you remain passive (God-not-You)?
 - Does God begin your spiritual growth, then you take over (God-then-You)?
 - Does God do some, and you do some, as with a partnership (God-plus-You)?
 - Or does spiritual growth happen another way?

“So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”

Philippians 2:12

It appears Paul answers this dilemma for us with the principle of God-in-You.

God is in you.

“For it is God who is at work in you, both to desire and to work for *His* good pleasure.”

Philippians 2:13

Notice that Paul does not try to rationalize God-in-You. Instead, he states it as two truths.

- So, when we combine verses 12–13, Paul states the two truths.
 - You are actively working to grow spiritually because God is actively working within you to grow you spiritually.

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you, both to desire and to work for *His* good pleasure.

Philippians 2:12–13

The apostle Peter also emphasizes the God-in-you principle of spiritual growth.

For His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. Through these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of *the* divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world on account of lust.

2 Peter 1:2–3

Again, Paul emphasizes the God-in-you principle of spiritual growth to the church in Corinth.

But by the grace of God, I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain, but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.

1 Corinthians 15:10

- Being in Christ means that God is in us (Christ in you/God in you).
 - Thus, it is His sovereign power that is the foundation of everything we do.
- All of this Scripture shows that the great mystery of sanctification is what the Bible teaches to be true: God is in you.
 - Paul is not talking about earning your sanctification or causing yourself to grow spiritually.
 - He is teaching Christians to live out the spiritual growth given to them by God's grace. God is in you.
 - Christians are not entirely passive or active in spiritual growth or a partnership with God. God is working 100 percent, and we are working 100 percent because God is in you. Consequently, Christians will grow to be more and more like Jesus, so be joyful and not anxious about how you are doing.
 - Paul emphasizes that this is the goal of the Christian life.

“Finally, my brothers *and sisters*, rejoice in the Lord.”

Philippians 3:1

Paul describes all the worldly things He gained by birthright and His zeal toward God shown in His performance and counts them all as a loss compared to His union with Christ.

“For whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them *mere* rubbish, so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith.”

Philippians 3:8–9

The great source of anxiety in sanctification comes from our own doing.

- We crave to earn merit for our deeds, lost in the appetites and glory of this world.
 - We often attribute this verse to the quest for possessions.
 - It equally refers to a quest for idols for our Christian performance.
 - Recall the first teaching from Hebrews 5–6.

“For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even as I weep, *that they are* the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is *their* appetite, and *whose* glory is in their shame, who have their minds on earthly things.”

Philippians 3:18–19

Beware not to let concerns about your spiritual growth sneak up on you.

- We get tied up in not only our performance but also the performance of others.
- The division quickly sets in, and we forget our first love, the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform the body of our lowly condition into conformity with His glorious body, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.”

Philippians 3:20–21

Paul channels the earlier teaching of Jesus about anxiety in Chapter Four.

- This is the third beatitude, showcasing the Christian character.
 - Christians are humble and gracious toward others because they know their spiritual condition and mourn.
 - But, mostly, they are gentle because the *Lord is near* (*Engus*, near in space and time).
 - It is the sanctification principle of God-in-you.
 - You are sealed with His Spirit, right here and right now.
 - Christians are not content with what they do but with what God has already done for them.

Paul writes,

“Let your gentle *spirit* be known to all people. The Lord is near.”

Philippians 4:5

Paul emphasizes not being anxious.

- Often, Christians experiencing anxiety in spiritual growth seem to forget everything they know to be true about God.

Paul says,

“Do not be anxious about anything.”

Philippians 4:6

- When we look to our accomplishments or the accomplishments of others for sanctification, we will become anxious.
 - We forget the promise that God is in us.
- So when we look to the sovereign power of God and His promises, we will find peace.

For this purpose, I also labor, striving according to His power, which works mightily within me.

Colossians 1:29

- In Paul's final words to the Philippians, he reminds them of their identity as saints.
 - He uses the term *hagios*, which has been ripped from its biblical context.
 - It is not a term for a righteous person immortalized in stained glass or stone sculpture.
 - It is the term Paul used for all who are in Christ.
 - It means sanctified ones or separated ones.
- You, dear brothers and sisters, are saints.
- Being in a covenant union with Christ is God-in-you, the reality of being a saint.

“Greet every saint in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 4:21

- Because of Christ's work, believers are set apart unto God.
- Our work for Christ does not set us apart.
 - There is a big difference.
 - One brings peace and freedom; the other brings anxiety and slavery.
- Simply put, we are sanctified because God is in us.
- Thus, we are sanctified once and for all time and are being sanctified according to His will and not ours.

Summary

- We are not passive in our sanctification. It is not to let go and let God.
- Equally, God does not kick our sanctification into play, and then we take over.
- Nor is our sanctification a matter of God doing part and we do the rest.
- Our sanctification is only possible with God in us. He does everything necessary for our salvation and unites us with His Son through His Spirit, resulting in spiritual growth.
God does all, and we do all.

Johnathan Edwards.

However, God is always first.

WEEK SIX

“THE WORK OF ONE”

The work of One

Our lives are filled with inconsistencies.

- We tend to hate disorder, yet our cars are a mess.
- We lose weight only to gain it back.
- We join gyms and buy exercise equipment, but we seldom use it.
- We praise our friends and family only to complain about them in the following sentence.
- We are a walking contradiction.

Our spiritual lives are no different.

- We know and proclaim that God’s grace saves us, but then we condemn ourselves as being unproductive Christians.
 - Some teach that if you continue to sin, you are never saved in the first place.
 - We are eager to do holy things but repeat the same old sins.
- Paul was no different. He even showed this same struggle in his writing.

Today, we narrow our scope of spiritual growth through our union with Christ with the biblical principle of the work of One.

- This concept affecting our spiritual growth is called monergism.
 - Derived from the Greek words ‘mono’ meaning ‘one’ and ‘ergon’ or ‘ergism’ meaning ‘to work,’ monergism refers to the work of One.
- Who is the “One,” and what does this mean for our spiritual journey?

Romans 7 gives us a riddle to address this.

- This riddle is the sinner/saint paradigm or the “Simul.”
 - A paradigm is a clear example of something.
- So, the most evident example we can have of the condition of mankind is that we are both sinners and saints.

The apostle Paul describes himself at the time he wrote this letter. As the text will show, he does not describe his past self before his conversion on the Damascus Road.

Read Romans 7:15–8:2

The “Simul” and sin.

- It rejects God-Not-Me, God-Then-Me, and God-Plus-Me.
- It implies that it is impossible for fallen mankind not to sin.
 - It is impossible for the “Work of One” to be us.

The “Simul” and sanctification.

- It is not anti-law
 - It proclaims that believers receive knowledge of the Law but no power to fulfill it.
 - Believers are not sanctified by their work but by the work of One.
- It is not anti-good works
 - They are not products of us but of our union with Christ for the sake of others.

The “Simul” does not excuse sin or make light of spiritual growth. It merely states that believers are saints and sinners at the same time. Enemies of God and children of God. The “Simul” proclaims that we are not defined by what we do but by who Christ is.

Paul expresses a puzzling situation—not concerning a theological issue but his behavior.

- He speaks in very plain language.

For I do not understand what I am doing; for I am not practicing what I want to do, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ However, if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law that *the Law is good*. ¹⁷ But now, no longer am I *the one* doing it, but sin that dwells in me. ¹⁸ For I know that good does not dwell in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.

Romans 7:15–18

He emphasizes that a Christian life measured by performance will show continual failure. Why?

- Because there is a conflict between a desire for obedience and acts of obedience.
- The old saying is, “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”
- According to Paul, that is all true.

Paul could see the excellent road but took the bad one anyway.

For I do not understand what I am doing; for I am not practicing what I want to do, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ However, if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law that *the Law is good*. ¹⁷ But now, no longer am I *the one* doing it, but sin that dwells in me. ¹⁸ For I know that good does not dwell in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.

Romans 7:15–18

Paul says the Christian life is lived in two realities: the spirit and the flesh.

- The voice of our consciousness will verify this in ourselves.

For I do not understand what I am doing; for I am not practicing what I want to do, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ However, if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law that *the Law is good*. ¹⁷ But now, no longer am I *the one* doing it, but sin that dwells in me. ¹⁸ For I know that good does not dwell in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.

Romans 7:15–18

Jesus addressed this conflict of spirit and flesh when He spoke with Nicodemus, a Pharisee, in Jerusalem. For any spiritual growth to occur, it must come from the work of One.

Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; ² this man came to Jesus at night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You have come from God *as* a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.” ³ Jesus responded and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless someone is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

⁴ Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a person be born when he is old? He cannot enter his mother’s womb a second time and be born, can he?” ⁵ Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless someone is born of water and *the* Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which has been born of the flesh is flesh, and that which has been born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’

John 3:1–7

Paul gets to the meat of his riddle with a discussion on the human will.

- How do we choose to do the things we do?

For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. ²⁰ But if I do the very thing I do not want, I am no longer *the one* doing it, but sin that dwells in me.

Romans 7:19–20

When Johnathan Edwards was asked what the will was, he answered, “The will is in the mind choosing.”

- This implies that we are not robots or machines of some type.
- Otherwise, there would be no morality involved. Sin would not be a thing. **“The will is the mind choosing.”**

Johnathan Edwards

Paul was emphasizing this same thing.

- Humans freely choose their actions based on their greatest desire at the time.
 - We are not indifferent or neutral.
 - There will always be an inclination to do one thing or another.

For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. ²⁰ But if I do the very thing I do not want, I am no longer *the one* doing it, but sin that dwells in me.

Romans 7:19–20

Paul makes clear that mankind's greatest inclination is to resist God.

- Paul is not saying that we can all absolve ourselves because sin is in us, and that is that.
- He merely recognizes, as we all are to do, that even though he is sanctified, sin still dwells within him.

For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. ²⁰ But if I do the very thing I do not want, I am no longer *the one* doing it, but sin that dwells in me.

Romans 7:19–20

Remember here that Paul characterizes himself as one who wants to do good.

I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. ²² For I joyfully agree with the Law of God in the inner person, ²³ but I see a different Law in the parts of my body waging war against the Law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the Law of sin, *the Law* which is in my body's parts.

Romans 7:21–23

Then, he acknowledges a severe issue with being obedient that he cannot fully control.

- NOTE: This should eliminate any notion that Paul is talking about his state before his conversion because no unregenerate person joyfully agrees with God (Ps 1).

I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. ²² For I joyfully agree with the Law of God in the inner person, ²³ but I see a different Law in the parts of my body waging war against the Law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the Law of sin, *the Law* which is in my body's parts.

Romans 7:21–23

Then Paul sums up the condition of mankind that is often in direct conflict with many teachings today.

Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?

Romans 7:24

The world and even many churches cringe at Paul's language here.

- They say it is way too dark for a Christian.
- Paul must have been speaking of himself before conversion.
 - Yet, we still sing amazing grace.
 - But do not think of ourselves as wretched.
 - We prefer morally challenged or primarily suitable.

- I am reminded of when Isaiah caught just a glimpse of the sovereign holiness of God in a dream and cried out,

“Woe to me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of armies.”

Isaiah 6:5

Paul viewed his condition as a Christian as wretched.

- He knew he was saved, sanctified, and made righteous before God while still in a constant war against sin.
- So, he looked to something much more significant than himself to grow spiritually—the work of One.

Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?

Romans 7:24

So, Paul thanks the work of One Jesus Christ for all the blessings of salvation.

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Romans 7:25

Paul’s final statements in chapter 7 emphasize his understanding of who he was as a Christian.

- This is critical to addressing anxiety in spiritual growth.
- We will fail when we measure our progress in sanctification through our efforts.

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the Law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the Law of sin.

Romans 7:25

Then we come to the apex statement of the monergistic (work of One) act in the saint/sinner example.

- Therefore, it is the result of everything that was just said.
- The work of One ensures that we will be sanctified because we have been justified in union with Christ.
- This is one of the most beautiful verses in the Bible for our spiritual growth.
- No performance is necessary.

Therefore there is now no condemnation at all for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 8:1

The world and the church may condemn you, and you may blame yourself.

- But rest assured: Those in union with Christ are those He has set free from performance-based sanctification.

For the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the Law of sin and of death.

Ephesians 8:2

Summary

In the “Simul” of Romans 7.

- We see why we need the work of One in sanctification.
- We see who the work of One is in Jesus Christ.
- Only the work of Christ can take us from the struggles of the flesh and failure to the glorious conclusion that we stand holy and blameless before God.

Do you remember the woman the Pharisees brought into the temple to stone for adultery in John 8? Jesus shamed them all into dropping their rocks and going home. Jesus stood before the woman, not holding a rock but offering kind words. The best she had ever heard. He said, neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.

How much of an impact would it have on you if God in the flesh stood before you, held your hand, and said, from this day forward, I will not condemn you for anything?

He did, in the greatest act of monergism in the Bible.

There is now no condemnation at all for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:1

WEEK SEVEN

“DO VS. DONE”

Do Vs. Done

Today, I invite you to embrace your role as a theologian. We are all engaged in the profound act of reading, discussing, and studying the Word of God. This active participation in theology is a testament to our growing love for the divine.

The center of our spiritual growth is Christ.

- So, the best way to understand and appreciate our spiritual growth and sanctification is to emphasize the gospel, but not exclusively.
- This is because the Bible emphasizes a distinction between Law and Gospel.
- We will not appreciate the gospel unless the Law is set forth clearly.
- Martin Luther viewed the Law as a mirror that reflected our inadequacy in contrast to God's perfection in the gospel.

Righteousness

All people want to be declared righteous in some fashion.

- The general definition of righteousness is presenting yourself correctly or conforming to a set standard.
- Two types of righteousness in Scripture: Practical and positional
 - Practical.
 - Based on what you do.
 - Pursuing what is right before God.
 - Living in obedience.
 - Is conditional.
 - Positional.
 - Based on what Christ has done.
 - Righteousness received from God.
 - Is unconditional.
 - Christian righteousness.

It is crucial to distinguish Christian righteousness from practical righteousness.

- Christian righteousness is not based on our works but on the grace of God.
- This understanding should bring a sense of relief from the burden of work and inspire us with the gift of grace freely given to us.
- Note: We grow spiritually based on righteousness.

If you want spiritual growth based on practical righteousness, you must earn it through work.

Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ²”Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘I am the Lord your God. ³You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt where you lived, nor are you to do what is done in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you; you shall not walk in their statutes. ⁴You are to perform My judgments and keep My statutes, to live in accord with them; I am the Lord your God. ⁵So you shall keep My

statutes and My judgments, which, *if* a person follows them, then he will live by them; I am the Lord.

Leviticus 18:1–5

If your spiritual growth is anchored in positional righteousness, it is not something you earn through your efforts. Instead, it is a gift bestowed upon you through grace. Positional righteousness is Christian righteousness.

But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness, ⁶ just as David also speaks of the blessing of the person to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: ⁷ “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, And whose sins have been covered. ⁸ Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account.”

Romans 4:5–8

Christian righteousness is passive. It is the gospel. The gospel=Done.

Christian righteousness, from which our spiritual growth flows, is not worked for, not earned, not purchased, not bargained for; instead, it is a gift from which we receive and are dependent on another to work in us.

- Passive righteousness is grace-based.
- It is done for you. It is given to you.
- It is righteousness that belongs to someone else (Jesus) and is given to you because it cannot be earned or maintained by the flesh.

Knowing that a person is not justified by works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the Law; since by works of the Law, no flesh will be justified.

Galatians 2:16

Passive righteousness is a mystery because the world does not have a category for it.

- Even Christians have to swim against this current because of their sinful condition.
- Our flesh always wants active righteousness.
All other forms of righteousness are active. They are Law. Law=Do.

Practical righteousness is active and based on performance.

- You are doing something to earn a good standing before God, either by command or desire.
- Following the moral laws and other biblical imperatives

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours in your ignorance*,¹⁵ but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior;¹⁶ because it is written: “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

1 Peter 1: 14–16

This is the key to the Do vs. Done distinction.

The Law is Practical Righteousness

The Law is practical because it is active.

- It tells us what to do.
- It explains things and provides examples.

The gospel is positional righteousness and is passive.

- It does everything for us.
- Can the gospel also be practical? YES IT CAN.

How?

- Because it directly affects the conscious.
- It comforts our thoughts and delivers peace.
- It is the antidote for anxiety.
- The gospel cleanses our need for practical righteousness.
- As powerful and perfect as the Law of God is, it cannot quiet a troubled conscience.

For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh,¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Hebrews 9:13–14

Man’s sinful reasoning cannot restrain itself from active righteousness without the gospel.

- So, the only remedy for spiritual growth anxiety is our union with Christ, by which we receive His righteousness.
- This is the only hope to quiet the voice that accuses us in your conscience right now.
- Jesus Christ has already done everything necessary to sanctify you unto God.

Let us examine six differences between Law and the Gospel critical to our spiritual growth.

Revelation

The Law was created with mankind and written on their hearts so that they would listen and obey it.

The gospel proclaims acts of divine grace that are free from merit.

Contents

The Law tells us what to do but does not provide the power to do it.

However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, “The person who performs them will live by them.”

Galatians 3:12

The gospel tells us what God is doing. It only offers. It never takes but always gives.

For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.

John 1:17

Measuring my growth with the Law is a terrifying thing; thus, it is to the gospel I cling.

Promises

The Law and the Gospel promise great blessings: standing holy before God and everlasting life. However, the Law’s promise has a condition attached: perfect obedience. It promises a great meal but is just out of reach.

And He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?”²⁷ And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.”²⁸ And He said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.”

Luke 10:26–28

Only the one who performs perfectly will receive blessings.

The gospel offers all the effects of salvation unconditionally.

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Ephesians 2:8–9

Offers

The Law offers threats.

Cursed is *anyone* who does not fulfill the words of this Law by doing them.

Deuteronomy 27:26

The gospel offers consolation.

It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost.

1 Timothy 1:15

Effects

The Law tells us what to do but does not give us the power to do it.

- It shows us our sinfulness but offers no help to be free from it.
- The Law provides no comfort to the sinner.
- This applies to all imperatives in the Bible.
- When Moses gave the Law of God to the people, they all trembled.
The gospel demands faith while giving it (Acts 16, the Philippian jailer).

- It does not rebuke sinners but offers peace and joy.
- It requires nothing to be produced that is good, whether toward God or men.
- It issues no orders. It demands nothing but gives everything.
- It produces good work in Christ.
The Law tells the sun it must shine. The gospel doesn't need to; it just does.

WEEK 8

“REST”

Rest

Today, we will examine the final lesson in our teaching series, Embracing Spiritual Growth. In this lesson, we will combine all the principles developed throughout this project to establish the rest we have in union with Christ.

Our text today is Hebrews 4:1–13

This text shows us that how we respond to the gospel is critical to addressing anxiety in spiritual growth.

What is the biblical idea of rest?

- First, let us establish some context for the term “rest” because the beginning of Chapter 4 begins with “Therefore.”
 - Hebrew *Shabbat* is a covenant sign of God’s sovereignty over all creation.
 - God’s rest in creation is one of completion.

And so the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their heavenly lights. By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because on it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

Genesis 2:1–3

- Greek *Anapauo*, the cessation of labor. Implying a previous toil or effort.
- The deeper theological meaning is that the work of God is finished in Christ.

“Come to Me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Matthew 11:28

- In terms of our sanctification.
 - The author of Hebrews implies that we enter God’s rest by ceasing our labor to earn sanctification through a covenant union with Christ.

Old Testament “Rest.”

- Enter the promised land.
- Deep theological significance.
 - It meant more than just entering a piece of land.
 - Restoration from the fall.
 - God’s plan for salvation (all effects).
 - The place where God dwells (God-In-You).
- God’s people always fall short.
- They may have physically entered the land but did not enter His spiritual rest (Joshua 21:43).

The author immediately reminds his audience that God’s chosen people failed to enter His rest under the Old Covenant.

- First, only hearing the gospel was insufficient for sanctification (Matt 13:10–15).

Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. ² For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.

Hebrews 4:1–2

The gospel requires a faith response.

- The Israelites were given the covenant commands of blessings and curses but failed anyway.
 - Although they believed in God, they did not believe God.
 - God requires dependency before obedience.
- Spiritual growth was the same then as today, not by performance but by faith (God-in-you).

Paul made a similar argument in Romans 4, arguing that faith alone gained Abraham righteousness.

Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.

Hebrews 4:1–2

Verse 3 is a quote from Psalm 95, emphasizing God’s judgment of those who do not believe and the blessing of those who do.

For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, “As I swore in My wrath, They shall not enter My rest,” although His works were finished from the foundation of the world.

Hebrews 4:3

The big takeaway is that this rest for believers is not a future event. It is a blessing for those in union with Christ through the gospel.

For we who have believed (*past tense*) enter (*present tense*) that rest, just as He has said,¹ “As I swore in My wrath, They shall not enter My rest,” although His works were finished from the foundation of the world.

Hebrews 4:3

¹ Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 116.

This warning from verse one is directed to those who have fallen short of what God has provided.

- In the context of spiritual growth, performance-based sanctification instead of God-In-You.
- This happens when a proper distinction between Law and Gospel is not established.

Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it.

Hebrews 4:1

Spiritual rest in God is a concept that has been present since creation.

- We know this today as a promised union with Christ.
 - Due to His finished work from the beginning.
 - Do not plug in manufactured idols to measure performance.

For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, “As I swore in My wrath, They shall not enter My rest,” although His works were finished from the foundation of the world.

Hebrews 4:3

Remember, spiritual rest has eluded mankind from the beginning.

- This is why Jesus had to call humanity to Himself for that rest.
 - Impossible without a sovereign act of God in the incarnation, through the power of the Spirit in response to the depravity of mankind.

“Come to Me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

Matthew 11:28

Verses 4 and 5 give two scriptural quotes. Verse 4 verifies the reality of spiritual rest.

For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh *day*: “And God rested on the seventh day from all His works”;⁵ and again in this *passage*, “They shall not enter My rest.”

Hebrews 4:4–5

Verse 5 emphasizes that God is sovereign (He always has the last word).

For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh *day*: “And God rested on the seventh day from all His works,” and again in this *passage*, “They shall not enter My rest.”

Hebrews 4:4–5

This next section implies that some did not enter God’s spiritual rest.

Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, He again fixes a certain day, “Today,” saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, “Today if you hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts.”

Hebrews 4:6–7

However, some will enter His rest.

- The contrast here is Law vs. Gospel.
- Performance-based sanctification vs. Grace-based sanctification.

Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, He again fixes a certain day, “Today,” saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, “Today if you hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts.”

Hebrews 4:6–7

Again, the author quotes Psalm 95 from David.

- This is what theologians call “Realized Eschatology.”²
 - Eschatology meaning “last things.”
 - Believers have promised blessings in the present as a result of God’s covenant. Do not resist these blessings by trying to earn them through performance.
 - We have all the promised spiritual rest in Christ now, even though it will not be fully realized until He returns.³

Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, He again fixes a certain day, “Today,” saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, “Today if you hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts.”

Hebrews 4:6–7

“Do not harden your hearts” is the author’s insistence that the warning from Psalm 95 applies to them.⁴

Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, He again fixes a certain day,

² Richard D. Phillips, *Hebrews: Reformed Expository Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006), 125–26.

³ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁴ Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 118.

“Today,” saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, “Today if you hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts.”

Hebrews 4:6–7

The author emphasizes that mankind’s idea of rest is different from God’s idea of rest.

- He points out that Joshua led the people to physical rest from their hard work in the wilderness.
- God’s spiritual rest would come another day and in another way—the **Work of One**.

For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.

Hebrews 4:8–9

Verse nine identifies this spiritual rest as “Sabbath” rest.

- The author uses a word not found anywhere else in Scripture to emphasize the difference between spiritual and physical rest.⁵
- The phrase “people of God” goes beyond Israel and includes Jews and gentiles of faith, similar to **1 Peter 2:10, *for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.***
 - In short, those who enter God’s Sabbath rest depend on God in faith and not by works.
 - Their sanctification will not be determined by performance.

For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.

Hebrews 4:8–9

Then comes a description of Sabbath rest.

- God is the standard for rest, so all of God’s people will enjoy what He did.
 - Again, this is not a hope for the future but one realized by all who believe.
 - Even though God rested on the Sabbath in peace and joy as His work was finished, He did not cease activity.
 - His rest continues to this day in providence.
 - We rest in peace and joy as well in the finished work of Christ.
- No performance is required.
- God’s rest is covenantal.
- It has been sanctified.
- It is sovereign.

⁵ Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 118.

- It is the work of One.
- It is realized in our union with Christ through the gospel.

For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.

Hebrews 4:10

Then, the final encouragement.

- Effort in spiritual growth is expected.
- Not for merit as before but in faith.

Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through *following* the same example of disobedience.

Hebrews 4:11

This encouragement comes from the effectiveness of God's Word through the Law and Gospel (Do vs. Done).

- God's Word permeates all of God's creation.
- It is living and active (a reflection of God).
- The two-edged sword indicates how God communicates His Word and its penetrating effects (what we do vs. what He has done).

For the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Hebrews 4:12

This final verse reflects how the Word of God affects the entire being.

- Nothing is hidden in our spiritual growth. Everything is bare and exposed to God.
- This is all the more reason why we need a representative, a mediator, and a priest to ensure our sanctification.
- That is God Himself in a promised union with you through Jesus Christ.

And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

Hebrews 4:13

Conclusion

Our spiritual growth is based on biblical truths in which we rest in our promised union in Christ.

- God is sovereign and holy.
 - He came in the flesh as Jesus Christ.
 - Through the power of the Spirit.
 - Because mankind was incapable of sanctifying themselves.
- God entered into a covenant with mankind that He alone would redeem them.
 - Through His redemption, we entered into a union with Christ in faith.
- God is in us. God is in you.
 - This is the work of One. Our work in spiritual growth is a product of His.
- Our spiritual growth is not based on what we do but on what He has already done for us in Jesus Christ.
- Our Spiritual growth is not a matter of performance but one of rest in our covenant union with Christ.
- In a believer's sanctification, their work is expected but never required.

APPENDIX L

PODCAST SERMONS

WEEK ONE

“DO NOT FEAR”

Welcome to the first sermon of the series Embracing Spiritual Growth.

What is spiritual growth? It is simply becoming more like Christ through the grace afforded us by God (2 Pet 1:1–8). This clear definition of spiritual growth helps us understand its purpose and process. It is not a vague or elusive concept but a tangible and achievable goal for every believer.

It’s important to note that spiritual growth often triggers anxiety in Christians. This anxiety usually arises when we measure our spiritual growth by our performance as Christians. We start questioning ourselves: Are we doing enough? Are we serving enough? Are we tithing enough? Are we reading our Bibles enough? This self-analysis can lead to confusion about how God judges our conduct. The critical point here is that when we lack a solid biblical understanding of what spiritual growth is and how it works in our lives, anxiety is likely to follow, often without us even realizing it.

There is a significant contrast between a person who suffers from anxiety, uncertainty, and worry and a person who calmly trusts in the Lord. One is like an unstable, fierce river that rushes over rocks, turning up sand and throwing foam and gravel everywhere, while the other is like a calm river that quietly travels through the land as it journeys back to the vast ocean from which it came. I have experienced this contrast in my spiritual journey, and I can tell you that the peace that comes from trusting in the Lord is far more rewarding than the anxiety that comes from relying on my own efforts.

This series is designed to help those who may be anxious about spiritual growth. Each week, we will focus on a different theme that builds upon the previous one to better understand how to apply our promised union with Christ to address spiritual growth anxiety. Whether you’re a new believer or have been on this journey for a while, these teachings can help us all grow in our faith and find peace in God’s grace.

Our theme for this first week is “Do Not Fear.”

In this sermon, I will directly address Jesus’ teaching on anxiety in Matthew 6:25–34 during His sermon on the Mount.

In these verses, Jesus is not talking about a clinically diagnosed anxiety disorder. Instead, He is addressing the typical day-to-day anxieties that affect us all. This reassures us that our anxieties, even those related to spiritual growth, are not unique or abnormal. They are part of our human experience, and Jesus understands and addresses them.

Some context is essential to help us out with these verses. Jesus has just finished stating,

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

Matthew 6:24

Much of what Jesus has said so far in this sermon, beginning in Chapter Five, is directly related to where the believer's heart is, where a believer's innermost feelings and inclinations are.

When Jesus uses the word “*serve*” in verse 24, He refers to being a slave to something. This concept aligns perfectly with our discussion on spiritual growth. Jesus is teaching us that we cannot be fully committed to the gospel of God (His grace in Jesus Christ) while also being committed to anything else. This is a crucial lesson in our journey of spiritual growth.

Jesus also applies the word wealth, translated as mammon (money). Either way, from the context of His entire sermon up to this point, wealth or mammon is anything that puts the believer in direct conflict with their loyalty to God. We could consider that an idol.

For our purpose today in addressing the anxiety that can accompany spiritual growth, Christians cannot be dependent on God and themselves. Consequently, since God is the one who sanctifies believers, *separates them unto Himself* (2 Thessalonians 2:13). Christians cannot perform works as a means of sanctification without developing anxiety. In other words, they cannot worry about doing enough to grow spiritually because what they do will never be enough.

This text's central theme is anxiety about what God has already provided.

Division I: Futility of Anxiety Matthew 6:25–26

So, Jesus immediately begins this segment with a conclusion.

“For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, *as to* what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, *as to* what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?”

Matthew 6:25

When reading Gospel accounts, we need to pay attention to the writer's tone. In this case, the apostle Matthew is recounting a statement from Jesus. The tone Matthew implies of Jesus is not so much a command not to be anxious. STOP WORRYING SO MUCH!! Instead, it appears to be more of a sympathetic statement that you do not need to be anxious. Jesus points out that life is the crucial element above everything else, and life is what He provides. The apostle John writes that Jesus is the word of life.

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life.

1 John 1:1

In terms of spiritual growth, we will develop anxiety when we worry that what Jesus has provided is not sufficient. We will start to add our efforts as a means to spiritual growth. We will create idols. When we do, that is where we will go to grow. However, whatever that is, it will certainly not bring the growth we hope it will. Jesus said as much a few verses earlier,

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 6:19–21

When we look at ourselves and our performance as a measure of spiritual growth, our hearts will be in that place. We will undoubtedly be disappointed and not content with what God has done through Christ. R.C. Sproul points out in his commentary on Matthew that Jesus used an illustration from nature to give believers an example of contentment.⁶ Jesus says,

Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?

Matthew 6:26

Jesus points out that it is the Father who feeds them. The birds utilize what the Father has provided. The same is true of spiritual growth. We participate in God’s providence for our spiritual growth, yet He is always the source, never us.

This principle is critical when we feel anxious about doing enough or wonder why our lives are not where we think they should be as Christians. Maybe we look at someone else and ask why they seem to grow spiritually but not me.”

Division II: Providence

So, let us look at what Jesus says about God’s providence.

And who of you, by being worried, can add a *single* hour to his life?

Matthew 6:27

Here, we get a glimpse of mankind’s mortality. Death is closely associated with spiritual growth because we only have a limited amount of time to progress in sanctification. So again, we worry that we are not becoming the Christians we need to be. So we anxiously grab hold of the steering wheel and arrogantly take over. I need to do this more or that more, and I will grow spiritually. I will become the Christian I should be.

Jesus says anxiety will not be helpful to you.

⁶ R.C. Sproul, *Matthew: An Expository Commentary* (Sanford, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2019), 157.

Again, Jesus provides an example of God's providence.

And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is *alive* today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, *will He* not much more *clothe* you? You of little faith!

Matthew 6:28–30

Jesus knew the brilliant displays of color and arrangements that adorned the wildflowers were the providence of God alone. The flowers did not generate their beauty, but they undoubtedly displayed it. We are no different. We are not responsible for our spiritual growth; we would mess it up if we were. However, we are commanded to display it. A Christian's spiritual growth is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, not the root. We cannot duct tape apples to a pear tree and call it an apple tree. Fruit will grow as God wills it done.

How often does Jesus call out believers for their lack of faith? A lot. However, this is not a gut punch. Again, notice that Jesus maintains a more sympathetic tone. We Christians are those of little faith. Remember when Jesus commanded Peter to join Him in walking on the water? Peter did okay for a second, and then he saw the wind, and the waves and anxiety hit him. He began to sink. Jesus had to reach out and grab him. What did He say to him? "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" Well, doubt is what we Christians do. Anxiety can always be attributed to that crisis of faith, doubt. Taking Jesus at His word is the key. Our sanctification is not dependent upon our faith but on His. We often fail to remember that even our belief is a gift from God. We cannot grow ourselves in the Spirit any more than we can manufacture faith. Jesus continues,

Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?'

Matthew 6:31

He says, do not be anxious. You do not need to put other things ahead of God. This carries over to our spiritual growth. We do not need to add the things we do to what Christ has already done. It is useless. We cannot stand at the base of the cross. Look up at our crucified Lord, bloody and whipped to the bone, and say, "I think I can add to that." No amount of tithe, no number of prayers, no kind words, no matter how many disciplines we practice, we cannot add to the cross. Make no mistake, folks, Christians are doers. Christians do good things. But those good things are only possible because of what Christ has already done for us.

I am the vine, you are the branches; the one who remains in Me, and I in him bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

John 15:5

His Sermon on the Mount continues,

For the gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

Matthew 6:32

This illustration of gentiles is significant. Jesus is saying that the gentiles have no antidote for anxiety. He refers to gentiles as those who are not believers. They base their righteousness on what they have and what they do—a stark difference from what Jesus has done for His chosen.

If you ask most people what brings them contentment in this life, you will get various answers, most of which center around what they can or cannot do.

In the context of spiritual growth, many believers might say how often they read Scripture, fast, evangelize, go on missions, or attend church on Sunday. However, those are only the fruits of their spiritual growth, not the cause of it.

Division III: The Cure for Anxiety. Matthew 6:33–34

Jesus ends this portion of His Sermon with the cure for anxiety.

But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Matthew 6:33

The righteousness we seek is not our own. It is alien to us. Luther taught this as the doctrine of imputation. We believe, and Jesus counts to us His righteousness. Jesus is teaching the same thing here: do not seek first to do the righteous stuff. Do not navel gaze. Do not look at yourself for the answer to your spiritual growth. Such things will only bring anxiety. God alone gives you what you need most: His righteousness through a union with Christ.

Jesus continues,

“So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Matthew 6:34

That is excellent news and a colossal reprimand. Most of our days are spent thinking about what we must do to show God we are worth the effort or convince Him to like us more. Hey, look over here. Do you see what I am doing? He knows darn well what you are doing.

Folks, Biblical contentment is the freedom grace provides, allowing us to strive for things. Anxiety is the result of being a slave to our desires, constantly having to strive for more. We cannot achieve contentment in our spiritual growth if we continually try to do more things

for the sake of righteousness. Instead, we must ensure that Christ is central to everything we do. In other words, contentment should not be our primary goal but a by-product of our efforts. Often, we try to achieve more in our spiritual growth without realizing that our efforts will never be enough. Similarly, the more we have, the more we want, and we will never be sanctified by what we do.

The apostle Paul wrote to the church in Philippi,

Let your gentle *spirit* be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:5–7

In summary, Jesus addressed common anxiety. This same anxiety is often experienced in spiritual growth. Am I doing enough for the cause of Christ?

His teaching emphasizes that all anxiety associated with our actions is unnecessary because God provides for our spiritual growth. Thus, the cure for stress and worry about how we perform as Christians is to rest in Him through our promised union with Christ.

What I would like you all to take away from this message is to be recipients of your spiritual growth rather than earners. And stress your dependency on Christ before your obedience.

You will produce the fruit of the Spirit if God permits but will never be the cause of them.

I pray God's grace and peace be with you all. Remember, know what you believe and why you believe it.

WEEK TWO

“BIBLICAL FOOTINGS”

Have you ever experienced a hurricane? I certainly have not. However, I have seen images of the devastation they cause. Images of trees torn up by their roots, cars thrown on top of buildings, and houses torn apart and splintered. So, building a home in an area that experiences hurricanes would require a solid structure to withstand powerful forces. After Jesus' sermon on the Mount, He delivered a short parable addressing this issue about two builders. It reads like this,

“Therefore, everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on

the rock. And everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house, and it fell—and its collapse was great.”

Matthew 7:24–27

Central Theme: Building Biblical Footings

Introduction

This is the second of our eight-sermon series, Embracing Spiritual Growth.

The theme of this message is building biblical footings, which refers to establishing a strong foundation for our faith based on the teachings of the Bible. Just as a house needs a solid foundation to withstand a storm, our faith needs a strong biblical foundation to navigate the challenges of spiritual growth.

The main focus of this sermon series is to promote spiritual development through our covenant union with Christ, which can help us gain confidence and reduce anxiety in sanctification. Last week, we presented a message on how the Bible generally views and addresses anxiety. We paralleled the typical anxiety Jesus spoke of during His sermon on the mount with the stress experienced in spiritual growth. We noted that this anxiety is often caused by an overemphasis on what we do as opposed to what has already been done for us in the work of Christ.

Our world is full of constant physical and spiritual threats, which can be likened to a big hurricane. However, the greatest danger to our spiritual well-being is when we measure our growth based on our performance. This perspective can cause stress and anxiety, thereby hindering us in the cause of Christ. So, how do we defend ourselves from such threats? We carefully build a solid theological structure that will not only alleviate stress in spiritual growth but also provide a sense of security and stability. This, in turn, will build confidence in our relationship with God.

Jesus’ parable about the importance of a solid foundation is a recurring theme throughout the New Testament. The last words of verse 27, “*and its collapse was great,*” emphasize that anything built on a weak foundation will crumble completely. Construction experts know that pouring concrete into forms placed on top of the ground is not enough to create a stable foundation, as it would shift and crack when the ground beneath it moves. This could cause the entire structure to collapse. To avoid such a situation, builders dig deep into the earth to create footings. Then, when the concrete is poured, those footings stabilize the foundation, preventing it from shifting and ensuring its stability. So, when the rain falls, the wind blows, and the floods come, and they will; whatever is built upon these footing will not fall.

Today, we will develop four footings to build the biblical principle of a believer’s covenant union with Christ. This union with Christ lies at the core of our faith and is critical to addressing anxiety experienced during spiritual growth. These footings are God, Jesus, the Spirit, and Humanity.

Division I: God is holy and sovereign.

Scripture helps us establish the first footing as God's holiness and sovereignty directly affect our covenant union with Christ in sanctification.

Holiness is the natural state of God. He is absolute in moral and spiritual purity. The Bible only gives one example of holiness: God. Leviticus 19:2 clarifies: ***“You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.”*** This means that a critical component of God's holiness is that He alone is the standard for all that is holy and for all that is righteous. For our purpose here, holiness is directly related to sanctification, the theological term for spiritual growth, and it means to make something holy. Likewise, the Hebrew word *qodesh* and the Greek word *hagios* share a common significance in that they both denote the act of consecrating or setting something apart as holy. As God is the source of holiness, only He can make something holy. So, right off the bat, we can see that sanctification is the exclusive work of God, both definitely and progressively. We are once and for all time, separated as holy unto God through faith in Jesus Christ. Then, we are gradually displayed as holy throughout the Christian life, not for us, but for others, never reaching perfection on this side of His glory.

God is also sovereign, meaning He is all-powerful, all-knowing, and always present. Moreover, God's sovereignty is absolute. His supremacy is beyond measure and cannot be diminished in any way. This is foundational to spiritual growth. God decides and controls all things, either by decree or permission. Psalm 135:5–6 tells us that whatever the Lord pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth. Another critical aspect of God's sovereignty is that there is never a time when God is not sovereign; He is immutable, unchanging; “For I, the Lord, do not change ...” (Mal 3:6 NASB). This unchanging nature of God's sovereignty should instill in us a sense of security and trust in His plans for our spiritual growth.

This first footing digs deep into the Christian soul, thereby anchoring spiritual growth in Almighty God's sovereign power and holiness rather than ours.

Applying God's sovereignty and holiness to our sanctification provides us with comfort instead of anxiety. God alone is the one who sanctifies. To think otherwise can weaken our resolve with anxiety, inclining us to question whether God is sovereign and holy. Where do Christians turn in such times? We turn to the supremacy and sufficiency of God's promises.

Paul's letter to the Romans reminds his readers of the righteousness given to Abraham through a covenant, a promise with God.

For this reason, *it is* by faith, in order that *it may be* in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, (as it is written: “I have made you a father of many nations”) in the presence of Him whom he believed, *that is*, God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that do not exist. In hope against hope, he believed so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, “So shall your descendants be.” Without becoming weak in faith, he contemplated his own body, now *as good as* dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; yet, with respect to the

promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what *God* had promised, He was able also to perform. Therefore, it was also credited to him as righteousness. Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him, but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, to *us* who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, *He* who was delivered over because of our wrongdoings, and was raised because of our justification.

Romans 4:16–25

Our spiritual growth rests upon the sovereignty and holiness of God. What He has promised, He will also deliver. What He has promised to all believers is a union with His Son.

“I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” Galatians 2:20.

Division II: God in the flesh as Jesus Christ.

Scripture places a second footing for our foundation through the incarnation of Jesus, which is critical to our covenant union with Him in sanctification.

The incarnation of Christ sealed our covenant union with Him.

When considering the incarnation of Christ, it is essential to understand that it was a deliberate choice made within the Godhead in eternity past. The decision was to consign the Son to endure divine wrath and unite God with His people through the power of the Holy Spirit. Simply put, God entered the world as flesh to fulfill His commitment or covenant of redemption.

The notion of Emmanuel, denoting “God-with-us,” finds its fullest expression in the incarnation. Before the advent of Christ, access to God was mediated through priests and prophets, and the revelation of God was only partial. Calvin likened it to a preliminary sketch, where the basic idea was provided, and the details would follow later with the advent of Christ. Through the incarnation, God became accessible in human form, affording a more comprehensive and tangible understanding of God’s presence in our midst. The apostle John writes,

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life—and the life was revealed, and we have seen and testified and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was revealed to us—what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. These things we write so that our joy may be made complete.

1 John 1:1–4

Through the incarnation, the mediator between God and man is Christ.

For there is one God *and* one mediator also between God and mankind, *the* man Christ Jesus.

1 Timothy 2:5

Christ is entirely God (Col 1:15; 2:9). The expressed image and glory of God (Heb 1:3)

Christ is entirely man fulfilling the promise (Gal 4:4). He experienced everything humans could experience (Heb 2:17; 4:15).

Spiritual growth for believers is found where divinity and humanity meet - in the incarnation of Christ.

When Christians first believe they are united with Christ (Gal 2:20), they are united with Him in his death and will be raised with Him in new life (Rom 6:4–5). None of this could have been possible had Christ not come in the flesh.

The second footing from which we develop the principle of a covenant union with Christ is the incarnation, which is bored deep into the Christian faith. Any spiritual growth within a Christian is inseparable from the incarnation of Christ. Only in Him, through Him, and because of Him are we sanctified.

Division III: The power of the Spirit.

A third footing is established in our covenant union with Christ in sanctification through the power of the Spirit.

After Jesus's resurrection, He made several appearances to His disciples. Luke records one such event where Jesus talked and ate with them. Just before He led His disciples out to the place where He would ascend into heaven, Jesus said,

“And behold, I am sending the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”

Luke 24:49

Notice that Luke does not recount Jesus saying He would send them the Spirit; he writes that Jesus said He would send “the promise of My Father.” This is the coming of the Spirit to Christians (John 14:16–17), but Jesus describes it as a promised event, one coming with power. Promises from God in the Bible come in the form of a covenant. John's Gospel writes these words from Jesus,

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and remind you of all that I said to you.”

John 14:26

The significance of this third footing is that the power of the Holy Spirit cannot be brushed aside in our covenant union with Christ. Paul emphasized in Romans 15 that the gospel he preached to the gentiles by the grace of God had sanctified them through the Holy Spirit, making them acceptable to God (Rom 15:15–16).

The Holy Spirit was sent in fulfillment of God’s promise through Jesus Christ to indwell believers permanently (Eph 1:13). This signifies not only the continuous presence of God and the complete sanctification of the believer but also the ongoing work of the Spirit to set them apart as holy for the benefit of others. Therefore, Christ accomplishes all His work within believers to sanctify them through the power of the Spirit. Hence, when spiritual fruit manifests in the life of a believer, it should be recognized as the fruit of the Spirit rather than the individual’s own achievement. The role of the Spirit in sanctification is evident in several ways, as demonstrated by the Spirit’s guidance of believers away from the desires of the flesh and towards the will of God, resulting in the increased prominence of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:16–26). Additionally, the Spirit provides comfort during challenging times (1 Thess 1:6) and works through believers to testify to Christ and convict others of sin, just to mention a few.

How is this helpful in addressing anxiety experienced during spiritual growth? Remember, measuring our performance to determine growth is one of the most significant causes of stress in sanctification. We are performing, but the root of our performance is always God.

Division IV: Humanity has fallen.

Scripture establishes a fourth and critical footing by showing us that our only hope of sanctification in our fallen state is through a covenant union with Christ.

Why is this? The condition of humanity after the fall in Eden was a dismal disaster. Paul writes this in Romans 5,

“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all mankind because all sinned.”

Romans 5:12

The apostle John emphasizes this same point by referring to mankind as “darkness” that rejects light (John 1:5). Paul makes clear that outside of Christ, we cannot understand the things of God (1 Cor 2:14–16). We cannot produce a single thought that is adequate without Christ; our ability to do so comes directly from God as servants in a covenant union with Him (2 Cor 3:5–6). Essentially, the problem with growing spiritually does not lie outside humanity but inside. What I mean by that is the anxiety experienced in spiritual growth is a result of performance-based sanctification instead of realizing our union with Christ.

Romans 3 makes this clear,

“There is no righteous person, not even one; There is no one who understands, There is no one who seeks out God; They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt; There is no one who does good, There is not even one.”

Romans 3:11–12

The point is that without a union with Christ, who has been given all authority by a sovereign and holy God, humanity would have no chance to grow spiritually.

Application

In the application of these four biblical footings, we should build our understanding of spiritual growth on God’s sovereignty and holiness. Why? God’s holiness is the standard for all that is righteous, and He alone is the one who makes things holy. This will encourage a greater desire to serve as those dependent on Him, to proclaim His word boldly, and to be assured that all His promises will be fulfilled.

We should build our understanding of spiritual growth upon Christ’s incarnation, which ensures a promised union with Him. The basis of our union with Christ can be traced back to His incarnation when He took on flesh and became one with humanity. The incarnation was not just to prepare Him for death and resurrection; it established an eternal and intimate relationship between God and His chosen people. This promised union with Christ is, in fact, a union with God Himself, who sanctifies us.

We should build our understanding of spiritual growth upon the power of the Spirit, which should comfort all Christians. It is the Spirit that grows believers. God promised to seal each believer with His Spirit, where His power is fully displayed in our sanctification (1 Pet 1:2).

Finally, we should base our understanding of spiritual growth on humanity’s sinful and broken nature. We are unable to grow spiritually on our own. This biblical principle helps us realize our desperate need for a savior, which continually drives us to Christ.

Conclusion

We have now placed four deeply dug footings to start our foundation in the context of spiritual growth: God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and humanity. We can be confident that the foundation we build will not move when the world around us shifts. It will remain solid and sturdy without cracking, splitting, turning, bending, or crumbling.

- God alone is sovereign over all things, including our spiritual growth. He alone decides how we will grow spiritually, and we cannot determine that path.
- His holiness is absolute and the standard for all righteousness. He alone makes things holy by His word and presence.
- The incarnation of Christ established the principle of an eternal, intimate relationship with God.
- The believer’s union with Christ is sealed and secured by the power of the Holy Spirit.

- The Holy Spirit leverages humanity's inherent sinful nature to convict and guide those who have received faith toward a union with Christ.
- These are the biblical footings for spiritual growth.
May grace and peace be with you all.

Remember, know what you believe and why you believe it.

WEEK THREE

“COVENANT FOUNDATIONS”

Embracing Spiritual Growth

Covenant Foundations

Our theme for this week is Covenant Foundations in our union with Christ.

A critical aspect of a believer's union with Christ is that it is covenantal. One does not have to read the Bible much before it becomes evident that covenant is a foundational principle in the Holy Scripture. Among many things, biblical covenants support the biblical narrative with the stories of people and their relationship with God. The principle of sanctification cannot be fully understood without understanding the biblical principle of covenant. Covenants explain the atoning work of Christ and how righteousness was granted in the Old Testament. Covenants define the sacraments of baptism, the Lord's supper, and the relationship with God and mankind through a union with Jesus. Finally, covenants provide assurance and confidence that whatever God promises will be fulfilled.

Today, we will examine Genesis 15, which reveals the significance of God's covenant and why understanding it is critical to our spiritual growth.

The late R.C. Sproul told a story about how a student approached him carrying a Bible during a Ligonier ministry conference. The student asked Dr. Sproul, “Would you please sign my Bible and put down your life verse? So, he did, writing Genesis 15:17. Sproul said to him if I could have only one book of the Bible, I would choose the book of Hebrews, and if I could only have one verse in the Bible, it would be Genesis 15:17. The student thanked him and went on his way. The next day, the student approached Dr. Sproul and said, “I do not get it.” Sproul replied, “You do not get what?” He answered, “I have read Genesis 15 and 15:17 several times, and I do not see the significance of it.” Sproul said, “Maybe I gave you the wrong verse. Let me recheck the verse.” So, Sproul read the verse and said, “No, that is the one.” Sproul recounts that the student looked at him like he had lost his mind.

So, let me read Dr. Sproul's “life verse.”

Now it came about, when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, a smoking oven and a flaming torch *appeared*, which passed between these pieces.

Genesis 15:17

This is one of the most significant texts in the Bible. But why? To answer that question, let us identify the theme of this message. God has seen fit to communicate His will for mankind through covenants.

Central theme: Keeper of the Covenant or the Keeper of the Promise. In this case, the keeper of the covenant is God.

Genesis 15 is arguably one of the most critical chapters in the Bible. The chapter can be broken down like this:

Covenant Confirmed, Genesis 15:1–5.

Covenant Believed, Genesis 15:6.

Covenant Affirmed, Genesis 15:7–18.

Before we begin, let us establish some context. First of all, what is the meaning of the word covenant? In both Hebrew and Greek, it refers to a legal agreement between two parties that is affirmed by a ritual that emphasizes its binding nature.

Scripture highlights several types of covenants.

- A covenant between equal human parties (Gen 21:27).
- A covenant between unequal human parties (1 Sam 11:1)
- A covenant between God and mankind (Gen 15:18).

A few elements need to be noted regarding covenants. They involve a promise or oath of some type.

- The term used in the New Testament is *diatheke*, which often refers to a last will and testament. It is a legal and irreversible agreement.
- They can be conditional or unconditional.
 - Meaning they can have requirements attached for fulfillment or no requirements at all.
 - Example of a conditional covenant. The sacrificial system established under the Mosaic covenant was conditional, requiring specific sacrifices in order to receive blessings. Even within the imperatives, there were additional conditions, such as the requirements for grain offerings detailed in Leviticus 2. These offerings had to be salted for flavor and free from leavening agents. It was also part of the provisions for the Levitical priests, and in Numbers 18:19, it is referred to as “An everlasting covenant of salt.”

- Example of an unconditional covenant. Unconditional covenants, also known as covenants of grace, are exemplified in Genesis 3:15, where God unconditionally promises to send a descendant of Eve to counteract the impact of Satan's actions in the garden. This covenant is made with no attached conditions, ensuring that the promised descendant will come regardless of any other circumstances.
- A believer's covenant union with Christ is an unconditional covenant that is sealed in blood. A significant principle we will cover in the text today.
 - There are penalties for breaking a covenant.
 - Covenants include descendants.
 - Covenants are affirmed in blood.
 - Signs can be attached to covenants to illustrate the binding nature (rainbows, circumcision, and the Sabbath day).

Let's read through Genesis 15,

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great." ² But Abram said, "Lord God, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" ³ Abram also said, "Since You have given me no son, one who has been born in my house is my heir." ⁴ Then behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "This man will not be your heir; but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." ⁵ And He took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." ⁶ Then he believed in the Lord; and He credited it to him as righteousness. ⁷ And He said to him, "I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it." ⁸ But he said, "Lord God, how may I know that I will possess it?" ⁹ So He said to him, "Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." ¹⁰ Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, and laid each half opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds. ¹¹ And birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away.

¹² Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror *and* great darkness fell upon him. ¹³ Then *God* said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years. ¹⁴ But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions. ¹⁵ As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age. ¹⁶ Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the wrongdoing of the Amorite is not yet complete."

¹⁷ Now it came about, when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, a smoking oven and a flaming torch *appeared* which passed between these pieces. ¹⁸ On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram.

This promise from God is what we call today the Abrahamic covenant.

Division I: Confirmation of the covenant

Now, we come to the first part of Genesis 15 with a covenant confirmed.

After these things, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying,

“Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great.”

Genesis 15:1

Right off the bat, we see God assure Abram that He is the one who provides protection and rewards.

However, Abram responded unusually,

But Abram said, “Lord God, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” Abram also said, “Since You have given me no son, one who has been born in my house is my heir.”

Genesis 15:2–3

Abram essentially reminded God that the promise he was given back in Genesis 12 has not been fulfilled. So, he suggested making his heir Eliezer of Damascus.

The Lord rejected Abram’s suggestion and confirmed his covenant (agreement) with him. Take note that the covenant God establishes with Abram is unconditional. God alone is the covenant keeper. There are no requirements for Abram to meet, as this is a covenant of grace, the same type of covenant expressed in our union with Christ under the new covenant.

So the Lord confirms His covenant with Abram,

Then, behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, “This man will not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.” And He took him outside and said, “Now look toward the heavens and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.”

Genesis 15:4–5

The Lord further confirmed His covenant with Abram by taking him outside to show him the night sky.

Have you ever gazed at a pitch-black sky without any surrounding light? It is a breathtaking view. In its vast expanse is a dim cloud stretching across the night sky. Today, we call it the Milky Way, which appears as a dense cloud, but in reality, it’s made up of billions upon billions of stars.

Abram’s eyes undoubtedly took in this sight; his descendants would be just as numerous. Even though Abram had no son at the time, God made a covenant promise and provided specific

details to confirm it. God assured Abram that his reward would be great. Not only would Abram have a son, but his descendants would be too numerous to count. This was a binding promise.

What followed was the covenant promise fulfilled. From Abram's own body came Isaac. The multitude of descendants that will come from Isaac we know to be the nation of Israel. From the nation of Israel, we will see further evidence of the promised descendant of the woman from Genesis 3:15. This descendant will come from the Israeli tribe of Judea, specifically from the house of David. This descendant will be the promised Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. It is in Jesus Christ that all who believe receive the covenant blessing given to Abraham.

Paul writes in Romans,

“Through Isaac, your descendants shall be named.” That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.”

Romans 9:7–8

Now, we come to Abram's response to God's confirmation of His covenant. His response is the heart of the gospel.

Division II: Believing the covenant.

The second point in Genesis 15 is the significance of believing the covenant.

Then, he believed in the Lord, and He credited it to him as righteousness.

Genesis 15:6

Genesis 15:6 is the first time the verb *believe* is used in the Bible, where righteousness is attained through faith in God's promises. This is critical to addressing anxiety in spiritual growth, and quite frankly, it is vital to the spiritual growth period. This verse teaches us what faith is: believing God. Not just believing in God but believing God. Again, this biblical truth lies at the heart of our spiritual growth through a covenant union with Christ. God promised us that union when we believe.

Folks, this verse carries immense weight as it showcases Abram's unwavering faith in God's promise (covenant) of a son. This is the verse that the apostle Paul uses to unfold the Doctrine of Justification in Romans 4, and he brings out Abram as his star witness. He emphasizes the notion of justification by faith alone as a state of believing God's promises, as opposed to any work of the flesh. Consequently, our sanctification comes through our justification emphasized through God's covenants. Our union with Christ is a covenant promise from which believers are provided sanctification.

So, the most relevant part of Genesis 15:6 is that God considered Abram righteous not because of his actions but because he believed in God's covenant. Take special note here because, in chapters 12–14 of Genesis, we read of Abram's obedience to God since he left the Ur of the Chaldeans—leaving his father to travel to the land of Canaan. He built altars for the

sacrifice and worship of God. He defeated evil kings, honored believing kings, and resisted the temptation of kings. Abram walked with God, spoke with God, and followed God—even though he often sinned, God protected him. Yet, despite all that he had done, God did not deem Abram righteous until he believed in the covenant promise of a son. Through the seed of Abram, God’s covenants would be fulfilled through the Messiah, Jesus Christ, including our sanctification.

In John’s Gospel, we read of Jesus saying,

“Your father Abraham was overjoyed that he would see My day, and he saw *it* and rejoiced.”

John 8:56

That’s the thing about faith: it reaches into the future. In this case, 2000 years into the future, through a covenant with God, the promise of a son, and the coming of a Messiah who will bring to the world a new covenant in which all who believe will not only be counted as righteous but will also be sanctified, set apart by God for God. So, when we look to do things to grow spiritually, we must remember that we are already sanctified through our covenant union with Christ. This union is established when we believe, which is also a gift from God.

Finally, we read that God secures his covenant in Genesis 15:7–18.

Division III: Affirming the covenant

And He said to him, “I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it.”

Genesis 15:7

Of course, God made this promise in Genesis 12, but now it will be affirmed. God reminds Abram that He is the Sovereign in this covenant relationship: “I am (Yahweh) the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it.” Note who is taking the actions here. It is God alone.

And He said to him, “I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it.”

Genesis 15:7

Now, here we have Abram’s reply. Remember, just a few minutes earlier, Abram believed the Lord, and it was counted to him as righteousness, but now his faith has wilted a bit.

But he said, “Lord God, how may I know that I will possess it?”

Genesis 15:8

The events of Abram’s life appear to be catching up to him and weakening his faith. After all, he is over 85 years old by now. So, he appeals to God for some way of knowing that

God will deliver on His promise. Asking for a sign during Abram's time was not a matter of unbelief but simply an affirmation. However, It does magnify mankind's weakness in the flesh. We all suffer from this condition, which brings anxiety to our spiritual growth.

- We might question, "How do I know that Christ is in me, and I am in Him?"

It is as though Abram was saying, It is not that I do not believe you, Lord, but can you help me with my weakness?

Have you ever been where Abram is in his faith?

- How can I know I am a child of the promise?
- How can I know I am in a covenant union with Christ?

God does not rebuke Abram. Instead, He reassures him with a guarantee.

So He said to him, "Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two and laid each half opposite the other, but he did not cut the birds. Birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away.

Genesis 15:9–11

Abram would have known very quickly what was going on. This is how the covenant was affirmed during Abram's time in Near Eastern culture. Notaries were not available during this time to ratify an agreement or draft a legal document. Instead, covenants were sealed and affirmed in blood. This was accomplished by cutting specific animals in two and arranging the pieces in a line. Then, the two parties of the covenant would walk through the blood of the cut animals to guarantee the agreement. Today, this is spoken of as cutting a deal. Essentially, they agreed that should one of them break the covenant, they would be cut in two. This seemingly violent and bloody act emphasized the binding effect of a covenant (Jer 34:18–19).

So, after Abram arranged the animals, he waited for a while, long enough for the vultures to come. This is critical to how we view spiritual growth in a covenant union with Christ. It is not always immediate. Often, we have to wait patiently and chase off vultures.

After Abram waited some time, God showed up and put Abram into a deep sleep. This sleep is reminiscent of the same sleep God placed upon Adam when He created woman.

Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him.

Genesis 15:12

The Bible tells us that Abram experienced a sleep filled with terror and darkness. What Abram experienced is undoubtedly the same terror all sinful flesh experiences in the presence of

holiness, and this type of experience in the Bible usually precedes a threatening revelation. The early saints often refer to this as “the dark night of the soul.”

Now, God begins to speak to Abram, revealing future events concerning his descendants.

Then God said to Abram, “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward, they will come out with many possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age. Then, in the fourth generation, they will return here, for the wrongdoing of the Amorite is not yet complete.”

Genesis 15:13–16

We see the significance of God’s covenant for future generations and events. Why is God saying this to Abram? God’s covenants are unveiled over time, and God is guaranteeing the fulfillment of His covenant.

Abram would not receive the promised land, but his descendants would. The Old Testament saints were not saved by faith in the work of Christ. Instead, they were saved by believing in God’s promise of Him through the covenants.

Again, this is a critical component of addressing anxiety in spiritual growth. We are impatient with God’s promises and often want to take matters into our own hands concerning our spiritual growth. We become anxious because of a lack of evidence. However, our sanctification depends on a covenant promise, not our performance.

Every biblical example we get of a person taking matters into their own hands outside of the will of God always ends badly. We always emphasize what we are doing too much compared to what has already been done for us in Christ.

Impatience is a common human trait, even among Jesus’ disciples. This trait can stem from selfishness and performance-based spiritual growth while setting aside our need for dependence on God’s constant grace in our lives.

Now we come to Sproul’s “life verse.” Note that what God is about to do here, He will do alone.

Now it came about, when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, a smoking oven and a flaming torch *appeared*, which passed between these pieces.

Genesis 15:17

Usually, both parties would walk between the divided animals, establishing a mutual responsibility to keep and maintain the covenant, but not this time, which is often the case with God. God becomes the keeper when he pours out His grace in a covenant relationship. The same is true in our covenant union with Christ. We do not keep or maintain this union; God does.

Abram sees the divided animals and the blood and the presence of God manifest in the smoking oven and flaming torch passing through the carnage. The author of Hebrews tells us that when God entered a covenant with Abram, He could swear by nothing more significant than Himself (Heb 6:13). When God makes this covenant, He essentially says, “If I break this covenant, may I be cut in two just as these animals.” God promises in His covenants that He guarantees them by His divine power. These covenants cannot and will not be undone (Gen 17:7). So, in terms of our spiritual growth, God guarantees a believer’s union with Christ, and in doing so, He guarantees their spiritual growth. So, focusing on your performance to be sanctified will give you nothing.

We see in the next verse these words:

On that day, the Lord made a covenant with Abram ...

Genesis 15:18

God allowed Himself to be held accountable to the covenant to show His seriousness in fulfilling it.

Let’s skip to a small village called Nazareth in Galilee. Here, we come across a young Jewish girl named Mary, who is approached by the archangel Gabriel—a significant figure in the Bible. Gabriel informs Mary that God has chosen her to conceive a son. However, Mary is a virgin and doesn’t understand how this can happen. Gabriel explains that the Holy Spirit will soon enable this, and she will name her son Jesus. This child is the promised one, the Messiah, and the Son of God.

We read in Luke that later, Mary exalts the Lord with great joy, saying,

My soul exalts the Lord, And my spirit has rejoiced in God, my Savior.

Luke 1:46–47

She continues with a period of praise and worship and then finally adds,

**He has given help to His servant Israel, In remembrance of His mercy,
Just as He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and his descendants forever.”**

Luke 1:54–55

What was it that God acted upon in remembrance? Well, He acted upon a promise from Genesis 15:18.

On that day, the Lord made a covenant with Abram ...

Genesis 15:18

Conclusion

Have you heard of the Kedge Anchor, a sailing tool that helps navigate ships through treacherous waters? Unlike traditional anchors that hold us back, the Kedge Anchor serves a different purpose. It's a small anchor placed in a boat, which is lowered into the water. Once the ship reaches its desired location, the anchor is dropped with a cable attached, connected to a winch on the main ship. The winch then pulls the ship towards the location of the anchor. Similarly, God uses covenants to guide humanity by His will.

Several covenants are enacted through the pages of Holy Scripture, but this one with Abram is rich in covenant detail. We see God confirm the covenant with Abram by proclamation His intentions. We see the covenant believed through faith, and Abram is counted as righteous. We see the covenant guaranteed through an affirmation by God Himself. These covenant agreements are introduced in the creation account and continue to develop throughout redemptive history until they are ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ, culminating all of God's promises.

Our connection with Christ through the new covenant is crucial to our sanctification. This covenant forms a relationship between God and humanity and represents mankind's union with Christ. The previous covenants have paved the way for this final destination, a significant milestone in our spiritual journey.

The apostle Paul writes,

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.

Ephesians 1:3–4

Thank you for listening

Grace and peace be with you all. Remember, know what you believe and why you think it.

WEEK FOUR

“UNION”

Union

So far, we have examined the biblical perspective of anxiety and applied that to our sanctification. We have laid the groundwork for a covenant union with Christ in addressing spiritual growth anxiety through God's sovereignty and holiness, the incarnation, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the fallen state of mankind. We also looked at how critical it is to know that our union with Christ is covenantal. Today, we will look at this union through a vital exposition and explanation of Ephesians 1:1–14.

Quick context

- Author: The apostle Paul, while in a Roman prison
- Audience: It was sent to a collection of Ephesus churches to all those in Christ.
- A circular letter
- Central theme: gospel summary and implications, specifically to this teaching session is our union with Christ
- Immediately, we learn some critical things from Paul's introduction.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are at Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 1:1–2

- We learn that Paul is all for Christ by God's will. This sets the tone for addressing spiritual growth anxiety through our union with Christ.
 - God is the vine, Paul is the branch.
- We learn this is written to saints (Those sanctified through Christ).
 - This has an OT background.
 - This term refers to the “holy ones” of the OT (*Qadosh*).
 - They were set apart as holy, much like the tabernacle, temple, and sabbath, for the service of God.
 - This is critical to our purpose in addressing anxiety in sanctification because sanctification means to be set apart as holy.
 - Thus, saints are people sanctified by God.
- We also learn that the faithful are in Christ.
 - The phrase “in Christ” will be used eleven times in this letter, which is Paul's preferred way of referring to Christians.
 - It has a deep meaning: not only do the faithful believe in Christ, but their entire lives are in Christ, and He is in them, like a root in soil.
 - Again, this is a critical component of how we view our spiritual growth.
 - Christ is the root of all spiritual growth.

Verses 3–14 are one long sentence in Greek. So, as we look through these verses, we understand that they are all connected.

Verse 3 provides a fundamental principle for spiritual growth.

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ,

Ephesians 1:3

- Christians are those “in Christ” and blessed (not will be blessed) with every spiritual blessing in heaven.

- This means that all Christians have inherited the promise of eternal life, set apart as Holy to God, and given faith.
- In terms of our sanctification, all Christ accomplished is present in us.
 - Incarnation: God and humanity joined in the flesh (Covenant of redemption)
 - Crucifixion: Cleansed of the effects of sin
 - Imputation: Transfers His righteousness to us
- The one who provided this union with Christ is God, by His grace, through the blood of the covenant.

Paul makes the same point in Colossians,

“In Him, you have been made complete.”

Col. 2:10

What are these blessings? The rest of the paragraph unfolds them.

Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

Ephesians 1:4–6

- In the pre-creation eternity, God elected us to be united with Christ.
 - In doing so, we are considered sanctified in His sight.
- The doctrine of election is critical to our spiritual growth.
 - It is a covenant promise (Covenant of Redemption).
 - It reveals that while we do indeed choose Christ with our free will.
 - It is only because God had already chosen us in eternity past.
 - It is a mystery, but nevertheless, a biblical truth.
 - Similarly, we freely choose to come to Christ only because God had already elected us. Our union with Christ was pre-ordained.
 - This understanding underscores the sovereignty of God and the importance of His role in our spiritual growth.
- Do we then contribute to our spiritual growth?
 - Yes, 100 percent.
- But only because in eternity past, God had first deemed us holy and blameless before Him.
- Remember, our union with Christ is not a license to sin but an incentive to holiness.
 - Christians are chosen to set us apart as holy (sanctification).

What have we learned?

- Saints are those set apart as holy before God.
- All saints are in union with Christ.

- All who are in union with Christ have inherited the accomplishments of Christ.
- God chose all who are in union with Christ in eternity past.
- Christians were chosen to be sanctified.

It is only those in union with Christ that can say,

In Him, we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished on us.

Ephesians 1:7–8

In union with Christ,

- We have redemption through the blood covenant.
- Cleansing of the effects of sin
- All in the fullness of God's grace (No performance necessary)
- Not in small amounts, but poured out in a flood (deluge)

However, there is a future aspect to our union with Christ.

In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention, which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, *that is*, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth.

Ephesians 1:9–10

Again, notice who is doing all the verbs. God.

- Our union with Christ is moving toward the mystery of His will.
 - What is this mystery?
 - Those in Christ are enlightened with an understanding of His purpose.
 - His purpose is to redeem His elect through Christ.
- The “**summing up of all things**” means to merge all things.
 - When time once again joins eternity to merge heaven and earth
 - We see this in the incarnation.
 - A foundational principle in our union with Christ
 - This merging has significant implications for addressing the anxiety often experienced in spiritual growth.
 - Believers are given the mystery of eternity through a union with Christ.
 - God intends that all those in Christ will share eternity with Him.

What we have learned.

- We are already sanctified in union with Christ.

- We have received a flood of God's grace in union with Christ.
- All things (heaven and earth) come together in Christ.
- All are given the mystery of eternity in union with Christ.

Again, we immediately read of the sovereign power of God in our union with Christ.

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God's own* possession, to the praise of His glory.

Ephesians 1:11–14

We also read that our union with Christ is a blessing because we are God's people.

This is another place where Paul stresses the OT, the covenantal aspect of being chosen in Christ. The Jews are the first to hope in Christ.

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God's own* possession, to the praise of His glory.

Ephesians 1:11–14

Then Paul includes the gentiles (Everyone else).

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God's own* possession, to the praise of His glory.

Ephesians 1:11–14

- The union with Christ is emphasized. . . *after*,
 - Listening to the gospel (The gospel is about Jesus, not us.)
 - Believing (A gift from God)

- Sealing the union with Christ with the Spirit
- The Spirit of Promise is a bond (new covenant promise) initiated by Jesus (John 14:16–17).

I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, so that He may be with you forever; *the Helper is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it does not see Him or know Him; but you know Him because He remains with you and will be in you.*

John 14:16–17

This emphasizes that this is a covenant union.

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God’s own* possession, to the praise of His glory.

Ephesians 1:11–14

- Again, given as a promise (pledge) of our union with Christ (inheritance).
- It is the Holy Spirit that brings believers to their final inheritance.

Finally, we see a beautiful phrase, **“To the praise of His glory.”**

This sums up how and why we are in union with Christ.

- How did we come into union with Christ?
 - According to His purpose
- What is the purpose of God?

“This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.”

John 6:29

- Why?
 - To the praise of His glory
- Therefore, everything we do in our lives as Christians is in Christ.
 - In Him, we have obtained our inheritance.
 - It comes from God and returns to God, ***To the praise of His glory.***
 - It does not come from us, nor is it for us.
 - All the effects of our salvation are ***To the praise of His glory.***
 - This includes our spiritual growth. No anxiety is necessary.
- Yet, mankind is forever entangled in the false confidence of their own will and the praise of their glory.

- This is a breeding ground for anxiety in spiritual growth.
- When obedience to Christ becomes the measure of our spiritual growth, we will always come short.
- Yet, when dependency on Christ is the foundation of our sanctification, we will never be disappointed, and obedience will take care of itself.

Read Luke 18:9–17

Summary

- All blessings for spiritual growth are received in union with Christ.
- Our sanctification is complete in Christ.
- Our sanctification is predestined in Christ.
- If we measure our spiritual growth by obedience, we will always come short.

WEEK FIVE

“GOD-IN-YOU”

God-in-You

In the last sermon, we delved into the mystery of the connection between a believer and Christ, which the Bible depicts as a union.

This union is a profoundly spiritual concept that can be difficult for us, as physical beings, to comprehend fully. So, Scripture teaches us to grasp truths outside our experience and understanding.

As a reminder, the main focus of this sermon series is to promote spiritual development through our covenant union with Christ, which can help us gain confidence and reduce anxiety in sanctification.

This is the fifth sermon of our series, Embracing Spiritual Growth, and this week, we explore the theme of “God-in-you.” This is not a new expression of a believer’s relationship with God. The phrasing has been used in contemporary music and theological literature, such as Dane Ortlund’s book *Deeper*, and of course, Holy Scripture is saturated with the concept.

Paul’s letter to the Ephesians is at the heart of the concept of God-in-you. This week’s message will delve into Ephesians 2:1–10 and God’s plan for sanctification through our union with Christ.

From the apostle Paul,

And you were dead in your offenses and sins, ²in which you previously walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. ³Among them we too all previously lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the rest. ⁴But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our wrongdoings, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the ages to come He might show the boundless riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this *is* not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

Ephesians 2:1–10

Many of you are familiar with Michelangelo, an Italian sculptor and painter of the Renaissance. He was arguably one of the greatest artists of his time. One day, as he chipped away at a rough piece of marble, he was asked what he was trying to create. He famously replied, “I saw the angel in the stone and carved until I set him free.”

In his letter to the Ephesians, we see that the apostle Paul took a similar position concerning a believer’s spiritual growth. He believed that God shapes the life of every Christian according to His good intentions. This brings us to the key verse of our text today,

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

Ephesians 2:10

According to Paul, God takes every believer and gradually transforms them to resemble Jesus Christ. In other words, God not only sanctifies believers unto himself through Christ but also continues to sanctify them throughout their lives. God alone is the one who enables His chosen to do good works, and He does so in our union with His Son.

In verse 10, Paul illustrates this concept through the work of a skilled craftsman, with a particular emphasis on God’s intention for believers to be in union with His Son. This is God-in-you. God is working in the believer through their union with Christ.

Now, we need to understand Paul’s reasoning in this letter.

In verses 1–3, Paul writes to Ephesians who were already Christians. He wants them to understand what God had done to save them and His plan to grow them spiritually. Paul starts by explaining that all the fruit of salvation is a sovereign act of God and not a result of our performance or merit. This is critical to how we view our spiritual growth, especially when we measure our progress by our performance.

Suppose God were subject to the things of the flesh. He would not be sovereign if He were somehow obligated to advance us in holiness through our works. So, our sanctification is assured with God in us through Jesus Christ.

What does Paul say here about the status of mankind before a union with Christ?

And you were dead in your offenses and sins, ² in which you previously walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. ³ Among them we too all previously lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the rest.

Ephesians 2:1–3

According to Paul, mankind was spiritually dead and cut off from God. Their situation was hopeless. This lack of holiness left mankind in a state where they were not capable of a union with Him. Paul tells them they are dead their sins. Not wounded or sick with the ability to recover on their own, but dead. Dead means dead. This was our status before a union with Christ. We are incapable of spiritual growth outside of Christ.

Paul emphasized that because of our status, we practiced the ways of the world led by Satan. We walked a path of spiritual death. All of mankind was destined to suffer the wrath of God.

And you were dead in your offenses and sins, ² in which you previously walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. ³ Among them we too all previously lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the rest.

Ephesians 2:1–3

In verses 4–7, Paul explains how and why God saves and sanctifies sinners.

Paul first describes why God does this.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our wrongdoings, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).

Ephesians 2:4–5

This love is not poured out toward the innocent but to those in open rebellion toward Him. Anyone not in a covenant union with Christ is an enemy of God. However, as a demonstration of His love for us, God stepped into time and sacrificed Himself amid our total depravity. He did not wait for us to get better. He did not wait for us to read our Bibles more. He did not wait to see if we would go to church regularly. Instead, He brought a new covenant to a

fallen world, that whoever believes in the gospel would be sanctified and given eternal life in union with Him. No performance is required.

Paul emphasizes this concept further in his letter to the Romans,

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:8

These verses really drive home the God-in-you concept of sanctification. We are not strong or healthy on our own; in fact, we are dead. God-in-us makes us strong and alive even when we are dead in sin.

In his teachings to the Ephesians, Paul explained that they are connected to Christ in such a way that the blessings of eternity have been compressed into their present reality and that they do not need to worry about their spiritual growth. He wanted them to understand that the same things that God had done for Jesus, He had also done for them. Consequently, the anxiety that is experienced in spiritual growth can be overcome by the power of God-in-you. Again, no performance is required.

Paul chooses an eloquent and purposeful set of phrases to describe the provision of this power. He said that the Christians in Ephesus were made alive *together* with Christ, taken up to heaven *together* with Christ, and seated *together* alongside Christ in the heavenly realm. These are the benefits of God-in-you. He lives in us, and we are in Him through a covenant union with Christ.

Paul writes,

And raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the boundless riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 2:6–7

In verses 8–9, Paul summarizes the importance that all the products of our salvation are based solely on God's grace through faith in Christ and not on our works. This means that all the effects of our salvation are entirely the result of God's actions, not our own. This is the good news of our sanctification; no performance is required.

Many Christians know verses 8–9, which are, quite frankly, the best verses we can have concerning our perspective on spiritual growth.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Ephesians 2:8–9

It is important to note that the phrase *it is, it is the gift of God*, is not included in Greek text. This is only added for English grammar. Therefore, grace and faith are gifts from God and are emphasized by **“so that no one may boast.”** Our performance cannot achieve sanctification because God Himself is the standard for spiritual growth. No amount of our good deeds can meet this standard.

However, God provides sanctification without changing His standard of righteousness. The scales are tipped toward Him. The weight of perfection remains opposite our empty scales, and no one living in the flesh can move the balance. But God has a solution. Christ, being both God and man, died for us, taking eternal punishment upon Himself, thereby redeeming us to Himself and, with it, our sanctification the moment He cried out from the cross, *Tetelestai*, “It is finished.” At that moment, the weight of His perfection was moved to our empty scale, and all of God’s righteousness is now provided to us when we unify with Him through faith.

Now, we come to the key verse in this message. This is where Paul states the product of God’s grace: God-in-you.

He says,

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

Ephesians 2:10

The Greek word for workmanship implies “something that is made.” Indeed, this fits well with the effects of salvation being a product of God’s grace in Jesus Christ. The impact we are addressing here is our sanctification and our spiritual growth.

The Bible teaches us that even though we may not fully understand God’s grace, we still have a responsibility to act in a way that reflects it. According to Paul, God has already set out the good things we are to do, which will be done through us by God’s will. This means we do not have to wait for God to move us spiritually before we start living like Christians. In other words, we do not need a sign. We have already been prepared to do good work and show God’s kindness to others. This is the way God grows us spiritually. God is in us. We do not have to know everything about God to live for the cause of Christ because He has chosen to use us to reveal Himself to the world.

In John’s Gospel, we read of a blind man asked by the Jewish priests to explain how his blindness was healed. He replied,

“... one thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”

John 9:25.

If you read that entire encounter, you will quickly note that when this previously blind man gave Christ all the glory, man’s humility and God’s sovereign power were put in their rightful place, even when many mysteries remained. This is the beauty of embracing our spiritual

growth through a covenant union with Christ. It is through the promise of a new covenant that God is in you, sanctifying you for His glory alone. Once, you were blind, but now you see.

The apostle Paul said that every person who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ is God's workmanship. Even though people are naturally sinful, God has made them spiritually alive through a promised union in Christ.

Christians have been blessed with a double dose of creation. First, like everyone else, they were created physically (Col 1:16). Then, after unifying with Jesus, they are spiritually created anew. This happens because of their faith in the One God sent, who is also the one who created all things.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, *this person is a new creation*; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

2 Corinthians 5:17

But what is the purpose of this re-creation? Paul tells us in the second part of verse 10.

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

Ephesians 2:10

God re-created Christians for good works.

The answer to spiritual growth anxiety is found here in Ephesians 2:10. It explains the relationship between God's sovereignty and human responsibility. What God does and what we do. Take special note of this verse. It explains our spiritual growth perfectly. Christians are the grand masterpieces of God created in His Son through a sovereign display of His power. He did so for one purpose (which He alone prepared in eternity past): to live as Christians in good works. This is the God-in-you principle of sanctification. God works in you entirely so that you can do His will.

Many people are confused about good works. All world religions except one teach that excellent works enable us to achieve righteousness before God. The Bible does not teach that.

Many in the U.S. believe that God not only saves us because of our good works, but we assure and maintain our salvation through good works. Again, the Bible does not teach that.

The Bible simply teaches that we are created for good works, not as a result of good works.

Many believe they should measure their spiritual growth based on their good works. The more you do, the more you grow type of thinking. The Bible does not teach that.

Instead, the Bible teaches that good works are the purpose of the Christian life because Christians are created to do them through their union with Christ. Christians will produce good works according to the will of God because He is the one who created us to walk in them.

So, biblically, our spiritual growth *is not* a matter of God working instead of us. Many call this approach to sanctification a matter of “letting go and letting God.” This extremely passive approach would eliminate any human responsibility for spiritual growth.

It is also not a matter of God initiating spiritual growth, and then we take over. This would not account for mankind’s sinfulness. Jesus emphasizes that outside of Him, we can do nothing (John 15:5).

Finally, spiritual growth is not a cooperative effort between God and man. God does His part, and we do ours type of relationship. God and man are not partners in spiritual growth. The Bible is clear that mankind cannot hold up their end of anything, let alone a commitment to God for their sanctification. If this were true, we would still be operating under the sacrificial system of the Old Covenant, and there would be no need for Christ.

Instead, the Bible teaches us that God is crucial to our spiritual growth. He takes care of all the necessary things for our salvation and righteousness and connects us to His Son, Jesus. However, this doesn’t mean we do not have a role in our spiritual growth. We must unite with God and be passive and active in our spiritual journey. This concept brings together the idea of God’s control and our responsibility to grow spiritually.

Paul writes to the church in Corinth,

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.

1 Corinthians 15:10

Dear Christian, you will grow spiritually because God is in You. He is working in you 100 percent so you can do His will.

Thank you for listening. Grace and peace to you all; remember, know what you believe and why.

WEEK SIX

“THE WORK OF ONE”

The Work of One

Welcome to BrandofMan Ministries. Building one disciple at a time for the cause of Christ.

Today, we continue our Embracing Spiritual Growth series, a crucial journey for every believer, by focusing on the profound concept of “The Work of One.” This theological doctrine, monergism, encapsulates the idea of “One working.” While this principle applies to all creation and redemptive history, we will narrow our focus to its role in the believer’s sanctification.

Let us not forget our ultimate aim: to empower Christians to embrace their covenant union with Christ fully. This understanding is not just crucial, it is liberating. It promotes confidence and reduces anxiety in our spiritual growth journey, reminding us that we are not alone in this process.

As we continue our exploration, we encounter a crucial concept: monergism. This doctrine is pivotal in our spiritual growth, and understanding its influence is crucial. Monergism, a term that combines mono, meaning “one,” and ergism, meaning “to work,” is the cornerstone of our entire doctrine of sanctification. It emphasizes that all biblical teachings of the effects of salvation (including sanctification) are monergistic acts, the work of One, namely God. No human work or merit can be added to God’s grace without destroying grace.

Paul references this in Romans,

But if *it is* by grace, *it is* no longer on the basis of works since otherwise, grace is no longer grace.

Romans 11:6

It is a common misconception, perpetuated by some teachings within certain sections of the church, that the good news from God merely gets the believer in the door. Then, the believer develops and grows as a Christian through various means. This inaccurate belief often leads to anxiety and a performance-based approach to spiritual growth. However, the truth is that God, in His covenant with mankind, has already done the work of sending a redeemer with good news, the gospel. He has bridged the gap between Him and humanity through Jesus Christ. This was the work of One. This was the gateway to a union with Him and the foundation of a new life unified with Christ. This truth should bring us comfort and assurance, knowing that our spiritual growth is guided by God’s work.

However, this message is about spiritual growth. For believers to grow spiritually, they must continually return to the moment God sanctified them. This may seem like we are going backward, but it is quite the opposite. I would liken this to having a passport when traveling to a foreign country. The passport not only allows you to enter the country but also allows you to stay there. It is validation.

Today, we will delve into two core principles of God’s work in our spiritual growth: definitive sanctification, a significant milestone in our spiritual journey, and progressive sanctification, the ongoing process of becoming more like Christ. Understanding these concepts is key to our spiritual growth.

Before discussing sanctification, we must first understand what it means to be justified. Justification and sanctification are terms used to describe the work of Christ in different ways.

John Calvin emphasizes that sanctification and justification are blessings that flow from a believer's union with Christ.⁷

Justification is a legal term used to identify an act of God that pardons all sin from the believer and imputes the righteousness of Christ to them. Justification occurs immediately upon faith in Christ. So, the sinner is not justified by their work but by the perfect obedience of Christ. Justification is the work of One. From justification, sanctification springs forth.

Sanctification is a theological term used to identify an act of God that sets the believer apart as holy. While sanctification is distinct from justification, they are inseparable as fruit of the gospel. In addition, sanctification is defined in two ways: definitive and progressive. Definitive sanctification, like justification, is a once-for-all event that happens when a person comes to faith in Christ. Definitive sanctification is most commonly noted in Scripture and stands opposite to contemporary teaching. An excellent example of definitive sanctification is in Paul's letter to the Corinthians, where he attaches their sanctification with their coming to faith in Christ by emphasizing it in the past tense.

To the church of God in Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, and all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:2

In chapter six of this same epistle, Paul stresses the definitive sanctification of those called to faith in Christ. Again, note Paul's emphasis on their sanctification as being in the past tense.

Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

1 Corinthians 6:11

Of course, definitive sanctification can be characterized in several ways, but the one way critical to spiritual growth is its relationship to the believer's covenant union with Christ.

Paul stresses this unification as a past event.

God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

1 Corinthians 1:9

The breach between God and humanity that was instantly repaired in the new life of a believer is a definitive act of God, a virtuous effect of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. There is only one working in definitive sanctification, and that is God. Upon coming to faith,

⁷ Carl F. H. Henry, ed., *Basics of the Faith: An Evangelical Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 175, ProQuest Ebook Central.

God sets believers apart as holy unto Himself and forever unifies them with His Son through the power of the Holy Spirit. Even though definitive sanctification is emphasized in the letters of Paul and John as dying to sin, they also speak of the ongoing condition of sin in the lives of all believers.

John proclaims,

If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

1 John 1:8

And Paul, in Romans 7, emphasizes his conflict between the Spirit and the flesh.

For I do not understand what I am doing; for I am not practicing what I want *to do*, but I do the very thing I hate.

Romans 7:15

Yet, in the same letter, Paul writes,

Therefore, there is now no condemnation at all for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the Law of sin and of death.

Romans 8:1–2

Well, which is it then, Paul? Are we sinners or saints? Paul says both as he writes to Timothy.

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was previously a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are *found* in Christ Jesus. It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost. Yet for this reason, I found mercy so that in me as the foremost *sinner*, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, *be* honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

1 Timothy 1:12–17

In his commentary on Romans, Martin Luther wrote this concerning the believer as one who is both righteous and unrighteous.

“The saints, being righteous, are at the same time sinners; they are righteous because they believe in Christ, whose righteousness covers them and is imputed to them, but they are sinners because they do not fulfill the Law and are not without sinful desires. They are like

sick people in the care of a physician: they are really sick but healthy only in the hope and insofar as they begin to be better, healed, i.e., they will become healthy. Nothing can harm them so much as the presumption that they are, in fact, healthy, for it will cause a bad relapse.”

Martin Luther

This distinction is significant to our sanctification. We are not to view spiritual growth through the lens of those who believe they are righteous, even though sin is present in them. That view would be unbiblical, causing anxiety in spiritual growth. Instead, we are to view spiritual growth as both saints and sinners. So how, then, can anyone grow spiritually? Well, I think Jesus put it best to His disciples when He said,

”With people, this is impossible, but with God, all things are possible.”

Matthew 19:26

Because of this, the believer’s life is never understood to be stationary. Thus, it remains in a progressive state of sanctification because of the work of One: God.

Progressive sanctification is the growth of holiness in the believer to become closer to the image of Christ. This has both a positive and negative aspect. The believer slowly dies to sin while at the same time becoming more alive in the Spirit.

Paul writes,

But we all, with unveiled faces, looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 3:18.

In spiritual growth, it is essential to note that believers are being transformed by God rather than changing themselves. This transformation occurs through definitive and progressive sanctification, the work of only One. The phrase *“being transformed into the same image from glory to glory”* does not distinguish between reflecting or beholding the Lord’s glory. However, the result is the same in either case. When we behold the Lord’s glory, we reflect it, and this reflection can only occur after we have first beheld it. Again, this is a work of One.

Since God is the standard for our sanctification, it is too great a standard for fallen humanity to meet. Thus, a person’s sanctification can only come from an outside source. Martin Luther referred to this as *extra nos*, meaning “outside of us.” Therefore, our sanctification is the work of One, by God’s grace through Jesus Christ. If a person makes their sanctification a matter of personal performance, satisfaction will be impossible. This is the perspective we need to grow spiritually. We are dependent on our sanctification coming from God.

But God help us, we resist this principle. This strikes deep into our arrogance. We love the thought of captaining our ship into eternity. How can I possibly have moral stability if I depend on something other than myself?

The authors of Scripture were well aware of this human weakness and experienced it themselves. Heck, I'm the poster child of a prideful ship's captain. However, the author of Hebrews offers some encouragement with a focus on the work of One.

Therefore, since we also have such a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let's rid ourselves of every obstacle and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let's run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²looking only at Jesus, the originator and perfecter of the faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Hebrews 12:1–3

We often declare that our sanctification results from God's grace alone, but our actions sometimes contradict our words. We unknowingly engage in acts of performance to strengthen our resolve, which can harm our spiritual growth and lead to anxiety. This vulnerability can threaten the comfort we feel from the work of God in our sanctification.

So, when we look at the work of One in our spiritual growth, we see definitive and progressive sanctification.

Definitive sanctification is primarily focused on the idea that believers have died with Christ and risen with Him to a new life. Regardless of how we view this relationship, we must acknowledge that we are passive recipients of this sanctification. Our union with Christ makes the efficacy of Jesus' death and resurrection effective in us. The Father's call establishes this union for our sanctification, and we cannot define this call in terms of human effort. God is the operative principle that unifies us with Christ.

The process of progressive sanctification is focused on transforming believers to reflect the glory of the Lord, primarily through the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit helps us overcome our bodies' sinful tendencies and produces virtues that are both marks and results of sanctification. The Holy Spirit's unique privilege is to dwell in believers and work within them to help them become more like God and achieve their spiritual potential. Sanctification is not a result of some form of mental fitness or head knowledge but rather a continuous and renewing activity of the Holy Spirit. It is critical that believers remain active and not fall into the trap of quietism.

Paul provides an instructive but often misapplied text for progressive sanctification,

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³for it is God who is at work in you, both to desire and to work for *His* good pleasure.

Philippians 2:12–13

In this passage, Paul refers to the concept of definitive sanctification, a complete and final form of salvation achieved through the blood of Christ. We are called to actively work towards promoting this salvation to the world, which means that our spiritual growth should be focused on achieving this goal. Our efforts are not in vain because God is working in us, and His work is not hindered by our own. Instead, the two work together to achieve the same goal. Knowing that God is working in us should encourage us to work even harder towards the goal of being conformed to the image of God’s Son, not for our own sake, but for the sake of others and, ultimately, for the glory of God.

Thank you for listening,

Remember, Know what you believe and why you believe it.

WEEK SEVEN

“DO VS. DONE”

Do vs. Done

Welcome, brothers and sisters in Christ, to BrandofMan ministries. Here, we are united in our mission to build one disciple at a time for the cause of Christ.

Welcome to the sixth sermon of our transformative series, Embracing Spiritual Growth. This series is a collection of sermons and a journey of enlightenment and self-discovery. Each sermon is a steppingstone towards a deeper understanding of our faith and a closer relationship with Christ. In this series, we are addressing a believer’s sanctification through their covenant union with Christ and the performance-based anxiety that often comes with spiritual growth.

As we journey through this series, we have delved into how the Bible views anxiety associated with sanctification. We have laid the groundwork by understanding our union with Christ to address spiritual growth anxiety. We’ve explored the sovereignty and holiness of God, the incarnation of Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit, the depravity of mankind, and how God communicates His desires through covenants. We’ve gained a biblical understanding of our union with Christ through the God-in-you principle, which emphasizes the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in believers, and a deeper understanding of sanctification through the work of One: Almighty God.

Most of us have used bleach in one way or another, and we have all used vinegar. These two products are distinct from each other and are excellent disinfectants. However, they should never be used together. Combining them will produce chlorine gas, which will severely burn whatever it touches—skin, eyes, lungs, etc.—so combining these two distinct products results in losing their function.

In today's sermon, our theme is "Do vs. Done." We will delve into a critical principle that empowers us and enlightens us to extract what Scripture says, precisely, what the Bible says about how believers grow spiritually. This principle, known as the Law and Gospel distinction, is not a new principle of biblical interpretation. The authors of the New Testament frequently used it to interpret the Old Testament, and it was a primary method by which Jesus preached and taught, as was the apostle Paul. The Law refers to God's commands and expectations, while the gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ's sacrifice and salvation. The Law signifies what we must do, while the gospel signifies what has already been done for us. Understanding this principle is not just crucial, but it is a key that unlocks a deeper understanding of spiritual growth.

The biblical principle of distinguishing Law and Gospel is like the difference between bleach and vinegar. They both serve a purpose, but when combined, they lose their effectiveness. Martin Luther emphasized the importance of maintaining a "Law and Gospel" distinction in the Christian faith, just as we must understand the distinct roles of bleach and vinegar in our spiritual journey.

We have already learned that God conveys his plan of redemption to mankind through covenants. Now, we will see that He presents his covenants in two forms: conditionally, which is characterized by Law, such as the Ten Commandments; or unconditionally, which is characterized by the gospel, such as the promise of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ. For instance, the Law can be seen in the commandments given to Moses, while the gospel is evident in the promise of a Messiah throughout the Old Testament.

This is why there are only two religions in the world, as opposed to the thousands that claim they are distinct from the rest. The religion of Law argues that mankind can justify, validate, and maintain their standing with God based on their works, such as following religious rituals and rules. And there is the religion of the gospel, which claims God justifies, validates, and maintains mankind's relationship with Him through Jesus Christ, emphasizing faith and grace over works. Understanding this distinction is crucial to our spiritual growth and relationship with God. In other words, all religions can be categorized into these broad categories based on their understanding of how we relate to God.

There are only two religions: Christianity and everyone else. This is the prominent theme of Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians: how we view what we do instead of what has already been done for us.

Paul writes,

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

Ephesians 2:8-9

Central Theme: Knowing the distinction between Law and Gospel is the most significant principle in living Christ.

The first point is that the Law and Gospel distinction does not separate the Old Testament from the New Testament. There are plenty of examples of the presence of Law and Gospel throughout the Bible. Instead, we will look at what attributes separate these two biblical principles and how they cannot be combined and still function the same.

Let's take a closer look at the Law as mentioned in the Bible. The commands given in the Bible are considered directives from God and not mere suggestions. They are mandatory and must be followed. The Law is not limited to the Ten Commandments but includes every command or instruction mentioned in the Bible. It's important to note that obeying the Law requires perfection. This is a crucial aspect that cannot be overlooked.

God entered the first covenant with mankind based on keeping the Law perfectly. This is often referred to as the covenant of works. All covenants based on Law are conditional.

The Lord God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may freely eat; ¹⁷ but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for on the day that you eat from it you will certainly die."

Genesis 2:16–17

Note here that the Law does not allow for uncertainty; it is obvious. If you violate the command, you will certainly die. Of course, the opposite is implied: If you obey the command, you will live.

This is the standard carried throughout the pages of Scripture.

From Leviticus,

Keep, then, my statutes and decrees, for the person who carries them out will find life through them. I am the Lord.

Leviticus 18:5

From Deuteronomy,

"Cursed be anyone whose actions do not uphold the words of this Law!"

Deuteronomy 27:26

Then, after a couple of thousand years, God shows up in the flesh as a guy named Jesus. He gives a sermon on the side of a mountain (Matt 5–7), teaching how to understand and apply the Law. He starts by completely crushing everyone with the weight of the Law.

The first thing He does is tell people how important the Law is.

"Do not presume that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. ¹⁸ For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke of a letter shall pass from the Law, until all is

accomplished! ¹⁹ Therefore, whoever nullifies one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others *to do* the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ ”For I say to you that unless your righteousness far surpasses *that* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:17–20

Then, He shows a deeper meaning to the idea of perfection in keeping the Law.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery’; ²⁸ but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ Now if your right eye is causing you to sin, tear it out and throw it away from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your *body*, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand is causing you to sin, cut it off and throw it away from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your *body*, than for your whole body to go into hell.

Matthew 5: 27–30

He gives several examples of this. Then you have this little gem from the Epistle of James, where he emphasizes that the only way to obey the Law correctly is to follow it perfectly.

For whoever keeps the whole Law, but falls short in one particular, has become guilty in respect to all of it.

James 2:10

The apostle Paul drives home more good news concerning our ability to do things properly.

He writes,

The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the Law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*, ⁸ and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Romans 8:7–8

You see, the primary function of the Law is to show us how sinful we really are and that we desperately need a savior. Simply put, the Law always accuses. This is why spiritual growth is impossible outside of a union with Christ.

So, right now, you are saying, “You have not said one good thing yet.”

So here it is, the gospel. What is the gospel all about? The Bible tells us that it is about one thing and one thing only: Jesus Christ—his life, death, burial, and resurrection.

Paul writes,

Now I make known to you, brothers *and sisters*, the gospel which I preached to you, which you also received, in which you also stand, ² by which you also are saved, if you hold firmly to the word which I preached to you unless you believed in vain.

³ For I handed down to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.

1 Corinthians 15:1–4

So, the gospel is not about us. The most we can do with the gospel is receive it.

In Greek, it is pronounced *Euangelion* and means “good news.” Kings would often send runners carrying the *Euangelion* back from their battles to proclaim to the people that the king was victorious. There are no commands or Laws to follow in the gospel. This good news is unconditional. The biblical *Euangelion* declares what God has done for us through Christ.

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to ransom those under the Law, so that we might receive adoption.

Galatians 4:4–5

All the effects of salvation were accomplished in Christ. Christ fulfilled the perfect obedience to the Law for our sanctification. The believer’s spiritual growth is guaranteed through their union with Christ. No performance is necessary.

As Paul writes,

Therefore there is now no condemnation at all for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:1

While the Law always has conditions attached to it, it always has something for us to do—a “Do this and live” type of imperative. The gospel, on the other hand, has no conditions attached. There is nothing in it for us to do because the work of sanctification has already been done.

What an enormous weight has been lifted from God’s chosen through the gospel. Our sanctification and spiritual growth are not a matter of our work, as our work will always be imperfect. Instead, our sanctification comes through our union with Christ. It is a covenant promise made in eternity past. He is at work with us so that we will grow. He is the root of our sanctification; we are the fruit that He produces.

I liken this to the man lying on the ground with an enormous stone on his chest. Day after day, he struggles to remove the stone, but he cannot. The harder he tries, the heavier the stone becomes, making it difficult for him to breathe. One day, another man chooses to remove the stone and says to him, now go live your life in remembrance of me and as one free from the weight of the stone. This would seem to be the logical course for the man. To live out the rest of his life in gratitude for what the One had done by removing the stone. God help us, but that is not what most people do. Instead, they spend the rest of their lives crawling back under the stone to prove they were worth the effort to save. You see, the stone is the Law, and the Law is heavy. It is the work we must do to be righteous before God. The man under the stone is us struggling in vain against its weight. The other man is God in the flesh, as Jesus Christ. There is nothing we can do to remove that stone. Only Jesus could. It is done. So why in the world would we want to crawl back under it?

The distinction between Law and Gospel is everywhere: inside the church, outside the church, and certainly in Scripture. The Law equates to what we are told to do, while the gospel equates to what we are told is already done. They are distinct yet inseparable, and they can never be combined.

Let us briefly examine a story Jesus tells his disciples as they walk together in Capernaum. It is a good illustration of how Jesus taught the distinction between the Law and the gospel.

And someone came to Him and said, “Teacher, what good thing shall I do so that I may obtain eternal life?” ¹⁷ **And He said to him, “Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is *only* One who is good; but if you want to enter life, keep the commandments.”** ¹⁸ **Then he *said to Him, “Which ones?”** **And Jesus said, “You shall not commit murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not give false testimony;** ¹⁹ **Honor your father and mother; and You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”** ²⁰ **The young man *said to Him, “All these I have kept; what am I still lacking?”** ²¹ **Jesus said to him, “If you want to be complete, go *and* sell your possessions and give to *the* poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”** ²² **But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving, for he was one who owned much property.**

²³ **And Jesus said to His disciples, “Truly I say to you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven.** ²⁴ **And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”** ²⁵ **When the disciples heard *this*, they were very astonished and said, “Then who can be saved?”** ²⁶ **And looking at *them*, Jesus said to them, “With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”**

Matthew 19:16–26

You see, Jesus was approached by a man who thought he was doing well working out his sanctification, keeping the Law, and loving others as himself. So Jesus merely showed him that the Law always accuses. He increased the demand because perfection is the standard for spiritual growth; otherwise, we move one step forward and two steps back. Jesus told him to sell all his

stuff. The rich young ruler could not do it. It is always the same with the Law. Jesus said as much when His disciples questioned Him. They said, if this guy cannot be sanctified, then who can? Jesus said no one in the flesh. Only God can make someone holy.

In summary, God speaks to mankind through covenants based on the principle distinction between Law and Gospel. You will find this on almost every page of the Bible. Anytime you read in Scripture that you are required to do something, it is considered Law. The Law is always DO.

The gospel is distinct from the Law in that it does not require anything. It is based solely on what has been done through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Even in the Old Testament as shadows of things to come.

Even though Law and the Gospel are distinct, they should never be combined or cease functioning as God intended.

As we approach the commands of Scripture and the essentials, we always reflect on what the Law and Gospel indicate. What God has demanded of us in his Law (perfect obedience), He's provided in His gospel.

We are speaking of a unique doctrine found only in Christianity.

We understand that God counts us righteous and sanctified through Jesus Christ and the gospel. We do not have to fear God's commands, nor do we rely on them to earn spiritual growth. We do not have to manufacture our idols of performance to validate or maintain our faith. Instead, we are to delight and be joyful in our union with Christ, and we live the gospel forward.

Thank you for listening.

Grace and peace, and remember to know what you believe and why.

WEEK EIGHT

“REST”

Rest

Welcome, brothers and sisters in Christ, to BrandofMan Ministries, where we aim to build one disciple at a time for the cause of Christ. Today, we are here for our series' eighth and final sermon, Embracing Spiritual Growth. In this sermon, we will delve into all the principles we have discussed in this series concerning our sanctification and how we can address the anxiety that comes with it. Specifically, we will focus on the profound biblical principle of rest, which offers relief and comfort to our weary souls. So, let us explore this concept as the pinnacle of our spiritual growth journey.

I recall reading a fable once about a wagon master who was driving a wagon and a team of horses down an old country road when he came across an elderly man carrying a heavy load of wood on his shoulder. The wagon master, moved by compassion, offered the old man a ride in the wagon. The old man accepted and climbed into the back of the wagon, but the wagon master noticed that he continued to carry the weight of the wood on his shoulder and struggled with it. Despite being offered help, the old man did not release his burden.

You see, we are very similar in our spiritual growth. We gladly acknowledge the grace God has provided us in Jesus Christ, yet we resist putting down our burden of performance. So, even as we are in Christ, we still struggle against the weight of our works. However, just like the wagon master, Jesus truly wants us to rest.

We read some of the most unique and comforting words from Jesus in all of Scripture.

“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

Matthew 11:28–30

In Matthew 11, Jesus does not address the mundane struggles of daily life. Instead, He speaks to the burden of our inherent sinfulness and inability to change independently. This burden of sin places us in a state of spiritual inadequacy, leading to anxiety when we measure our progress as Christians based on our actions instead of what has already been accomplished for us. Our human flesh will always limit our work.

In John Bunyan’s novel, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, the protagonist, Christian, sets out on a journey to the City of Destruction. He carries a heavy backpack and struggles continuously to bear its weight. This burden remains with him throughout his journey until he reaches the place of Deliverance, where his burden is lifted. The place of Deliverance serves as an illustration of the cross of Christ. The weight of Christian’s burden was his sinfulness, which is a burden that we all carry. There was nothing Christian could do to alleviate the weight of his sinfulness until he reached the cross of Christ. This weight hindered him from achieving anything he attempted.

When Jesus surveyed the crowd with Him in Matthew 11, He could see and feel the weight they carried in their sinfulness that prevented them from His rest. So, He calls them to Himself as the one who will provide them with something they could not achieve: rest.

“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

Matthew 11:28–30

Who else could do such a thing but God? This is the work of One.

Then He made a promise, a covenant with them.

“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.”

Matthew 11:28–30

Jesus did not tell them they could come and earn their rest. He did not tell them they could achieve rest. He said, Come to Me, and I will give you rest.

Then, Jesus uses a true-to-life illustration to emphasize His point. He says,

Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me.

Matthew 11:29

During the first century, people used a type of yoke to carry or pull heavy loads. This yoke was not like the one most people think of, where two animals are joined together to work as a team. Instead, it was a device that a person would place on their shoulders to bear the weight of something they were carrying or pulling. This type of yoke was beneficial for carrying large amounts of water suspended from buckets attached to both ends of the yoke. By placing the yoke across their shoulders, people could easily carry heavy loads without straining their backs or arms.

When Jesus spoke of a yoke in the Bible, he was referring to this type of yoke. He promised to provide this kind of yoke to anyone who came to him, making their work more accessible and manageable. Jesus offered rest and work, but work was done according to his yoke. This meant that people could carry their burdens and fulfill their responsibilities in union with Him. Jesus is the source and the place of rest and the source of our work.

Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.”

Matthew 11:29–30

Christians must remember that we are in a covenantal relationship with Christ. We carry the yoke that He has promised, not our own. Furthermore, this is the rest we find in the God-in-you principle of spiritual growth. God is fully at work within us so that we can work fully in Him, according to His will, not our own. Ultimately, our rest is found in the work of One.

When we accept Christ’s yoke, we gain knowledge and understanding. Above all, we learn from Him. The gospel, the person of Christ, and His work are the primary things we learn. It is important to note that Jesus is not only the teacher but also the subject of the gospel. Learning the gospel leads us to depend on Him and ultimately obey Him. The root of much anxiety in a believer’s sanctification arises when obedience is placed before dependency. The key is understanding what God has done in Christ and how our actions relate to that. We refer to this as the Law and Gospel distinction.

We should compare the weight of our performance (what we do) for spiritual growth to the work of Christ (the gospel). Jesus' yoke is light, so our performance becomes insignificant compared to His.

The key to our rest is to have the correct burden, which Jesus says is light. Jesus' burden for us is not based on the pretense of being someone we are not, our guilt from past sins, our struggle with current sins, or the prospect of future sinful behavior. It is not based on our performance, fear, failure, or persecution. His burden for us is to rest in Him.

In Jeremiah, the Lord says,

Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, Where the good way is, and walk in it; Then you will find a resting place for your souls.

Jeremiah 6:16

The Christian doctrine of salvation emphasizes that through Jesus Christ, God has provided a way for humanity to be redeemed without requiring performance-based righteousness. In this view, sanctification is a process that is not dependent on human effort but comes from being united with Christ. While labor is still necessary, it has transformed in Christ, taking on a gentleness and humility that reflects the nature of Jesus himself.

In Hebrews, the Lord says,

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author, and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Hebrews 12:1–3

In Philippians, the Lord says,

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure.

Philippians 2:12–13

In John the Lord says,

Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.

John 14:27

Beloved brethren, it is imperative to remember that your belief in the union with Christ and the indwelling of God within you are both part of a divine covenant made by God Himself before the very inception of the universe. This covenant was a singular act so that no one could claim responsibility. God's will for our spiritual advancement is communicated through His Word, a two-edged sword of Law and Gospel. It is through this Word that we can find our rest in Him.

Thank you for participating in our series Embracing Spiritual Growth. I pray that it has enlightened you in some small way, according to the will of our Lord.

Grace and peace to you all, and remember to know what you believe and why you believe it.

APPENDIX M
INDIVIDUAL BIBLE STUDY

The Private Bible Study typically runs for an hour per session, though the length may be adjusted to accommodate individual preferences. Following each session, participants will provide written responses to six questions in their own words, to be submitted to the researcher the following week. By the conclusion of the eight-week program, each participant will have submitted forty responses.

WEEK ONE

“DO NOT FEAR”

Please read the following text from Scripture. You may use any version you like.

Hebrews 10:1–10

Please find below a list of theological questions. Please provide detailed responses and use the back of this paper if necessary. Please memorize **Hebrews 10:38**.

1. What is the author’s key message in this passage?

2. Why do you think the author included this passage?

3. What does this passage teach you about spiritual growth?

4. What application(s) did you find in this passage?

5. Why is this chapter important to your union with Christ?

WEEK TWO

“BIBLICAL FOOTINGS”

Please read the following text from Scripture. You may use any version you like.

Romans 3:10–18

Please find below a list of theological questions. Please provide detailed responses and use the back of this paper if necessary. Please memorize **Romans 3:11**.

1. What is the author’s key message in this passage?

2. Why do you think the author included this passage?

3. What does this passage teach you about spiritual growth?

4. What application(s) did you find in this passage?

5. Why is this chapter important to your union with Christ?

WEEK THREE

“COVENANT FOUNDATIONS”

Please read the following text from Scripture. You may use any version you like.

Hebrews 8:1–13

Please find below a list of theological questions. Please provide detailed responses and use the back of this paper if necessary. Please memorize **Mark 14:24**.

1. What is the author’s key message in this passage?
2. Why do you think the author included this passage?
3. What does this passage teach you about spiritual growth?
4. What application(s) did you find in this passage?
5. Why is this chapter important to your union with Christ?

WEEK FOUR

“UNION”

Please read the following text from Scripture. You may use any version you like.

Romans 6:8–11.

Please find below a list of theological questions. Please provide detailed responses and use the back of this paper if necessary. Please memorize **2 Corinthians 5:17**.

1. What is the author’s key message in this passage?
2. Why do you think the author included this passage?
3. What does this passage teach you about spiritual growth?
4. What application(s) did you find in this passage?
5. Why is this chapter important to your union with Christ?

WEEK FIVE
“GOD-IN-YOU”

Please read the following text from Scripture. You may use any version you like.

Galatians 3:23–29.

Please find below a list of theological questions. Please provide detailed responses and use the back of this paper if necessary. Please memorize **1 John 5:11–12.**

1. What is the author’s key message in this passage?
2. Why do you think the author included this passage?
3. What does this passage teach you about spiritual growth?
4. What application(s) did you find in this passage?
5. Why is this chapter important to your union with Christ?

WEEK SIX

“THE WORK OF ONE”

Please read the following text from Scripture. You may use any version you like.

Ephesians 2:1–10.

Please find below a list of theological questions. Please provide detailed responses and use the back of this paper if necessary. Please memorize **Ephesians 2:8–9**.

1. What is the author’s key message in this passage?
2. Why do you think the author included this passage?
3. What does this passage teach you about spiritual growth?
4. What application(s) did you find in this passage?
5. Why is this chapter important to your union with Christ?

WEEK SEVEN

“DO VS. DONE”

Please read the following text from Scripture. You may use any version you like.

Galatians 2:11–21.

Please find below a list of theological questions. Please provide detailed responses and use the back of this paper if necessary. Please memorize **Galatians 2:20**.

1. What is the author’s key message in this passage?
2. Why do you think the author included this passage?
3. What does this passage teach you about spiritual growth?
4. What application(s) did you find in this passage?
5. Why is this chapter important to your union with Christ?

WEEK EIGHT

“REST”

Please read the following text from Scripture. You may use any version you like.

Hebrews 4:1–16.

Please find below a list of theological questions. Please provide detailed responses and use the back of this paper if necessary. Please memorize **Hebrews 4:11**.

1. What is the author’s key message in this passage?
2. Why do you think the author included this passage?
3. What does this passage teach you about spiritual growth?
4. What application(s) did you find in this passage?
5. Why is this chapter important to your union with Christ?

APPENDIX N

Human Development Theory: Spiritual Formation and Christian Formation

The essence of spirituality goes beyond our physical existence and resides within our spirit. As individuals, we can recognize God's call and rely on grace to facilitate divine intervention. Spiritual growth for Christians aims to shape them into the likeness of Jesus Christ, made attainable by grace for the sake of others.⁸ This involves developing qualities such as empathy, mercy, and love of neighbor, which enrich our relationship with God, foster personal growth, and nurture healthy connections with others. Spiritual formation is a lifelong process in a community of believers, the church.

The church's primary task is to facilitate Christian spiritual formation, which three images in the Bible can summarize: nurture (agrarian illustrations), journey (tribulation and conflict), and struggle/death-resurrection (being crucified and resurrected in Christ).⁹ Staying connected to Jesus Christ and transforming into His likeness is essential. According to James Wilhoit, these three images capture the vital aspects of spiritual formation.¹⁰ Moreover, Dallas Willard argues that spiritual formation reflects Christ. He states, "Christian spiritual formation is focused entirely on Jesus."¹¹ Even though Christian spirituality varies across faith traditions, it is predominantly positive and focused on Christ. Additionally, Spirituality comprises both contemplative and apostolic dimensions. Contemplative spirituality involves seeking God in all things and is closely associated with the mystical aspect of faith, while apostolic spirituality

⁸ James R. Estep, and Jonathan H. Kim, ed., *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology & Human Development* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 241.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 245.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 245–46.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 246.

emphasizes active discipleship. Richard Foster classifies the history of the church into six movements: contemplative, holistic, charismatic, social justice, evangelical, and incarnational.¹²

Developing one's spiritual life is crucial in fostering a stronger relationship with Christ. The Christian faith has three distinct stages of spiritual transformation: purgation, illumination, and union.¹³ The process commences with a profound awakening where one encounters God and oneself. The subsequent stage involves relinquishing sins and placing one's faith in God. Finally, Christians consecrate themselves to God, pray continuously, and cultivate a deepening concern for others. The journey culminates in complete union through surrendering to grace, practicing quiet prayer, and achieving total unity. The Bible is an invaluable guide and inspiration for Christians throughout this journey.

The Christian community typically views biblical study in one of two ways: The church emphasizes interpreting the text for spiritual transformation, while biblical scholars advocate finding Christ at its core. Engaging with the text in a transformative process is a crucial aspect of biblical spirituality. However, reading the Bible for information and transformation can bring renewed enthusiasm, vitality, and spiritual growth. One potent means of delving into God's Word and establishing a more profound spiritual formation is practicing *Lectio Divina*, or "sacred reading."¹⁴ *Lectio Divina* encourages a deep level of engaging Scripture through the silence of listening, audible reading, speaking to God, contemplation, and the love of neighbor.¹⁵ Spiritual growth in Christianity is achieved through means of grace. John Wesley divided them into two categories: Instituted means of grace (ordained by Jesus Christ) and prudent means of

¹² Estep and Kim, *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology*, 250–52.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 253–55.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 258.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

grace (ordained by the church).¹⁶ Regular participation in these practices is critical to spiritual formation. Balanced spiritual disciplines are necessary to avoid legalism or the death of discipline. Moreover, this balanced approach to spiritual formation is interconnected with human development, where physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and moral domains feed into and out of the spiritual core, with greater attention given to theology.¹⁷ To attain complete spiritual growth, nurturing all six facets of the human persona, including the natural components, is essential. An all-encompassing methodology towards spiritual formation mandates the cultivation of all aspects of the Christian. Therefore, Christian formation aims to emulate Christ's qualities through God's grace. Christians engage in spiritual practices, study the Bible, and participate in communal worship to open their hearts to the life-changing power of God's grace.

Theological Growth

It is essential to understand that spiritual formation is a crucial aspect of growing as a Christian, as the spiritual characteristics of humans reflect the *imago Dei* (image of God).¹⁸ However, the participants will keep in mind that they cannot transform themselves into the image of Christ. Only through the power of the Holy Spirit will God transform them.¹⁹ Therefore, they will embrace this core principle and allow God to work in them to become more like Christ. The process of spiritual development extends beyond individual progress in Christ and encompasses the communal environment of the church. As participants will acknowledge their bond with Christ through the Holy Spirit and covenantal union, they also recognize that this bond

¹⁶ Estep and Kim, *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology*, 259.

¹⁷ "Scriptural Primacy: Theology and the social sciences are both used, but with more attention given to the theology," *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 241.

is reflected in the church as an extension of His ministry. Thus, spiritual formation pertains to both personal and collective growth in Christ. Through this basic understanding, everyday life for the participant becomes a means for spiritual growth and, subsequently, theological growth, as with Fowler's development of faith through the stages of life and relationships.²⁰ However, participants will discern there are also participatory responsibilities in spiritual growth enabled through the grace God pours out upon Christians.

During this course, participants will gain a profound understanding of the gradual and transformative process of spiritual development. They will explore biblical examples, including the "I AM" statements in the Gospel of John, and select verses from Hebrews, Galatians, Ephesians, and John 3 to gain valuable theological perspectives. In addition, participants will learn how to integrate their reverence for God and His promise of a covenantal union with Christ into their discipleship, which is both unwavering and essential. They will also discover that reading and meditating on Scripture is a powerful tool for spiritual growth. They will discipline themselves to experience God's Word through the *Lectio Divina* (Sacred reading) practice. This practice involves listening in silence, reading aloud, meditation, prayer, contemplation, and bearing the fruit of the Spirit.²¹ It leads Christians to profound spiritual growth, resulting in change in the Christian life.

Throughout the course, participants will develop a comprehensive understanding of the significance of spiritual disciplines. They will realize that spiritual practices alone do not necessarily lead to spiritual growth, which can be a source of anxiety during sanctification. Instead, they will discover through an application that committing to spiritual practices can assist

²⁰ Estep and Kim, *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology*, 170–75.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 258.

them in living a life that embodies the teachings of Christ. Furthermore, they will learn to view spiritual disciplines not as preserving their faith but as cultivating habitual actions that enrich their understanding and bring them closer to their covenant union with Christ.

Measuring Results

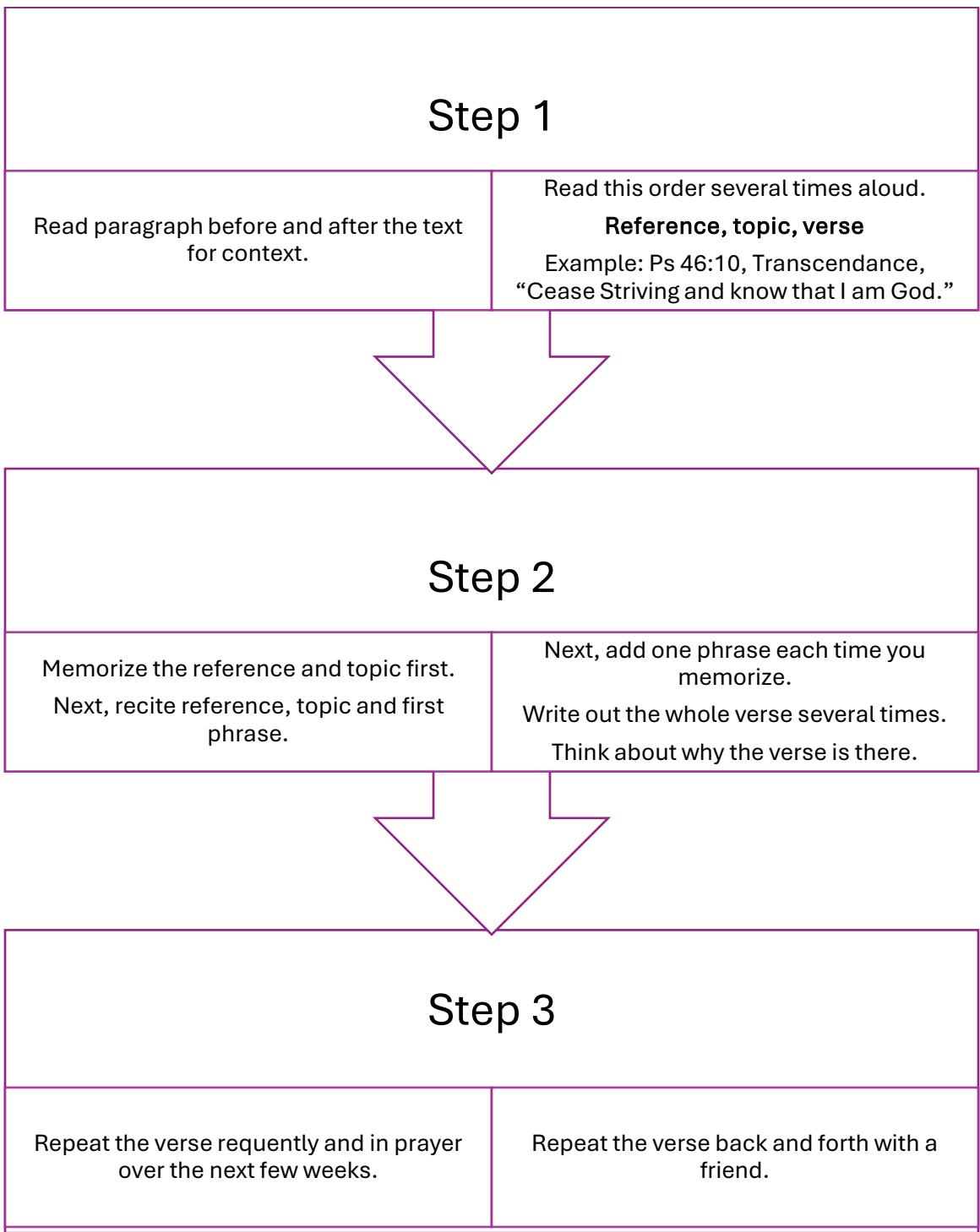
The present study aims to evaluate the impact of spiritual formation on Christian development by utilizing the Embracing Spiritual Growth curriculum. The data collection will involve a triangulated approach, including recorded interviews, surveys, and questionnaires administered before and after the curriculum is implemented. During the questionnaires and interviews, open-ended questions will be posed to engage participants concerning spiritual growth, and their responses will be transcribed verbatim. The researcher will then screen the answers to highlight keywords and phrases, group them by codes to produce reoccurring themes and concepts and evaluate the data using the Thematic Method to form conceptual models. This subjective analysis will be supported by objective data collected using a Likert scale from the pre-and post-intervention surveys and then analyzed using the t-test formula to determine the significance and effectiveness of the action research project.

The spiritual development theory in Christian formation focuses on spiritual growth's biblical and practical aspects. The researcher will process and evaluate weekly growth through the individual Bible study curriculum, integrating five questions into each weekly study outline, totaling forty questions over eight weeks. The use of empirical categories emphasized by Estep and Kim will significantly aid the researcher's ability to measure and determine the efficacy of subjective data. Specific to this action research project and ministry context, categories of spiritual growth, growth anxiety, God's sovereignty, human responsibility, and union with Christ will be established, albeit not exhaustively.

The objective of theological and spiritual advancement is to comprehend and implement definitive sanctification, progressively aligning oneself with the character of Christ. By doing so, individuals can mitigate the anxiety arising from misconceptions about spiritual growth. Armed with this perspective, the researcher is optimistic that integrating theology with spiritual development will yield positive results in embracing spiritual growth through a covenant union with Christ, reducing growth anxiety. By analyzing the data collected through this study, the researcher hopes to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of spiritual formation on Christian development and to identify effective strategies for promoting spiritual growth in this context.

APPENDIX O

TOPICAL MEMORY SYSTEM



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IRB APPROVAL LETTER

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

March 12, 2024

Will Hunsaker

Brandon Pugh

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY23-24-1333 DMIN 841 Embracing Spiritual Growth

Dear Will Hunsaker and Brandon Pugh,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds that your study does not meet the definition of human subjects research. This means you may begin your project with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your study/project is not considered human subjects research because (1) it will consist of quality improvement activities, which are not “designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge” according to 45 CFR 46. 102(1).

Please note that this decision only applies to your current application. Any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued non-human subject’s research status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

For a PDF of your IRB letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study Details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page.

Also, although you are welcome to use our recruitment and consent templates, you are not required to do so. **If you choose to use our documents, please replace the word *research* with the word *project* throughout both documents.**

If you have any questions about this determination or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your application’s status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP

Administrative Chair

Research Ethics Office