

# GROWING IN CHRIST

*book thirteen in the series:*

## THE OWNER'S MANUAL TO THE NEW YOU

**DOUG BRITTON, MFT**

Five-day Bible study for individuals, small groups, and churches

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Day One: Go on a Journey of Growth

Day Two: Learn from God

Day Three: Learn from Others

Day Four: Learn by Observing

Day Five: Review and Test

**Growing in Christ:** Book thirteen in “The Owner’s Manual to the New You”

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# The Owner's Manual to the New You

Forty-eight short books

(Each book includes a five-day Bible study and homework)

**By Doug Britton, MFT**

Twelve books on "Knowing God"

Twelve books on "Developing a Godly Character"

Twelve books on "Enjoying Healthy Relationships"

Twelve books on "Overcoming Personal Problems"

*For*

Individuals

Small Groups

Churches

Available free for personal use at:  
[www.dougbrittonbooks.com/owners-manual](http://www.dougbrittonbooks.com/owners-manual)

# The Owner's Manual to the New You

"The Owner's Manual to the New You," published by LifeTree Books, is a series of forty-eight cross-cultural discipleship books by Bible-based Marriage and Family Therapist Doug Britton. LifeTree Books is making these books available free of charge for individual use.

Each book is ideal for a five-day study by small groups, classes, or individuals. Although this is a forty-eight-book series, each book can be studied as a complete book by itself.

## **Knowing God**

- Book 1: Who is God?
- Book 2: Becoming a Believer
- Book 3: Your Identity in Christ
- Book 4: Quick Overview of the Bible
- Book 5: How to Study the Bible
- Book 6: How to Pray
- Book 7: Key Christian Practices
- Book 8: Successful Christian Living
- Book 9: Living a Joyful Life
- Book 10: Knowing God's Will
- Book 11: Obeying God
- Book 12: Living in God's Power

## **Developing a Godly Character**

- Book 13: Growing in Christ
- Book 14: Changing Your Self-Image
- Book 15: Changing Your Attitudes
- Book 16: Living with Humility
- Book 17: Living with Purpose
- Book 18: Living with Self-Control
- Book 19: Living with Integrity
- Book 20: Growing through Problems
- Book 21: Trusting God
- Book 22: Breaking Free from Our Culture
- Book 23: Handling Money Responsibly
- Book 24: Staying Faithful to God

## **Enjoying Healthy Relationships**

- Book 25: Keys to Healthy Relationships
- Book 26: Making Friends
- Book 27: Showing Grace to Others
- Book 28: Forgiving Others
- Book 29: Serving Others
- Book 30: Resolving Conflicts
- Book 31: Overcoming Peer Pressure
- Book 32: Helping Others with Wisdom
- Book 33: Dating, Marriage, and Sex
- Book 34: Embracing the Body of Christ
- Book 35: Respecting Authority
- Book 36: Sharing Your Faith

## **Overcoming Personal Problems**

- Book 37: Overcoming Your Anger (Part 1)
- Book 38: Overcoming Your Anger (Part 2)
- Book 39: Overcoming Rejection
- Book 40: Overcoming Temptation (Part 1)
- Book 41: Overcoming Temptation (Part 2)
- Book 42: Overcoming Anxiety and Fear
- Book 43: Overcoming Jealousy and Insecurity
- Book 44: Overcoming Self-Sufficiency
- Book 45: Overcoming Guilt and Shame
- Book 46: Overcoming Discouragement
- Book 47: Overcoming Failure
- Book 48: Overcoming the Fear of Death

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## Foreword

When I was first asked to write a series of downloadable books for intensive discipleship training, I was excited. Jesus has revolutionized my life, and I am glad to share his truths with you.

The pages you are about to study come straight from God's word. They contain truth that puts our feet on the path to the fullest life possible—truth that sets us free.

As Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32).

May God speak to your heart as you read, and may he bring his truth alive in your life.

Your brother in Christ,

Doug Britton

P.S. LifeTree Books is offering this downloadable book and all the other books in "The Owner's Manual to the New You" series free of charge. If you find these books helpful, please feel free to spread the news to churches, ministries, and individuals who might benefit from them.

## Small Group Leader's Guidelines

**Introduction.** These studies are for new believers as well as mature Christians. They are for small groups, discipleship classes, mentors, and individuals. They are ideal for studies lasting from sixty to ninety minutes.

**Choose the key points, verses, and discussion questions** you will talk about. Don't think you need to cover every verse and question. With new believers, go over the main points, key verses, and selected questions. Go into more depth with mature Christians.

**Begin and end each study with prayer.** Start by asking God to help each person grow from the study. At the end, ask everyone to pray for help to put God's truth into practice.

**Review homework.** Before starting the current lesson, ask group members to discuss their answers to some of the previous day's homework questions.

**Personalize the lesson.** Although it's okay to read each lesson word-for-word, the material will "come alive" if you discuss some of the key points in your own words. Share your own experiences and struggles, and how God has helped you.

**As you read, identify important points and key parts of verses.** Ask group members to circle them, and then explain why you want to emphasize these points.

**Get everyone involved.** The more people are actively involved, the more they are impacted by what you are studying. Don't ask questions that can be answered by "yes" or "no." For example, don't ask, "Do you have any thoughts about this?" Instead, ask, "How does this insight speak to you?"

**Consider breaking up into smaller groups** to discuss the questions if you are leading a large group or class.

**Use day five for a review and test.** Use the questions in day five as a review and/or test. Remove these pages if you do not want group members to see the questions ahead of time.

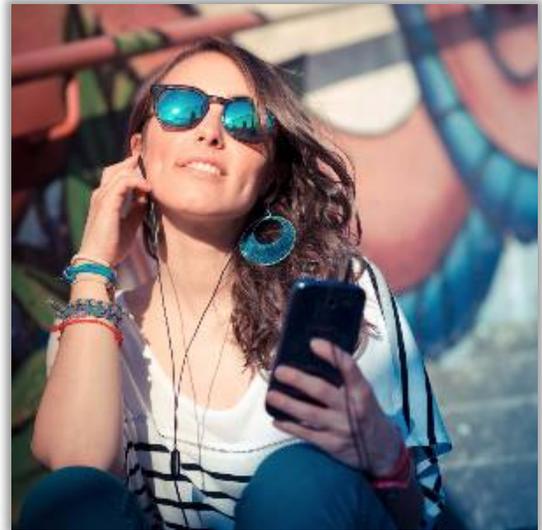
## Want to Learn More?

**Free online resources:** For more suggestions for small group leaders as well as many online Bible studies on Christianity and daily living (anger, marriage, self-image, finances, and more), visit [www.dougbrittonbooks.com/resources/small-groups](http://www.dougbrittonbooks.com/resources/small-groups)

**Small group leader's book:** For detailed information on how to lead small groups and overcome typical problems, visit [www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore/small-groups](http://www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore/small-groups).

## Day One: Go on a Journey of Growth

Imagine that you walked into the locker room of a professional basketball team and said you would like to join the team. Now imagine that, to your surprise, the team owner signed you up and gave you a uniform—even though you had never played basketball.



### Discussion questions

1. How well would you perform if the coach asked you to play in a game the next day? Explain your answer.
2. Could you depend on your natural athletic abilities to play basketball, or would you need to develop new skills, learn the plays, get into good physical shape, and strengthen your endurance?
3. Now imagine that in a few years you got really good and played in every game. Would you ever get to the point where you could say, “I don’t need to learn anything more, and I’m so good I don’t need to practice anymore”? Why or why not?

Becoming a Christian isn’t the same thing as joining a sports team, but there are similarities. When you join a team, if you want to be effective, you need to keep learning new plays, work on your techniques, and stay in shape.

When you become a believer, you also need to learn and grow. But instead of getting better at a game, you are getting better at life.

### Make it your goal to be transformed

Growing as a Christian means many things. For example, it means studying what the Bible says, developing your gifts, and learning to hear God’s voice.

Underneath all of these, growing as a Christian means allowing the Holy Spirit to change your thoughts, emotions, attitudes, priorities, and motives. In other words, it means letting God transform you.

When you grow in Christ, you are “being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

*For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. (2 Peter 1:5-9)*

In one famous passage, the Bible describes the process of being transformed as growing the fruit of the Spirit:

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23)*

#### **Discussion questions**

4. Describe what it means to be transformed in your own words.
5. Reread 2 Peter 1:5-9. How can you “make every effort to add to your faith”?

### **Are you willing to grow?**

When Jesus gave what is often called the “Sermon on the Mount,” he said something that deeply affects me:

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. (Matthew 5:6)*

These words always inspire me, frequently challenge me, and often convict me.

- They inspire me because that’s the type of person I want to be.
- They challenge me because sometimes I am spiritually lazy.
- They convict me because sometimes I completely forget about growing.

#### **Discussion questions**

6. Read Matthew 5:6. How do Jesus’ words affect you? Explain your answer.
7. Are you willing to grow as a Christian? Why or why not?

### **Ask God for a willing spirit.**

Even when we say we want to grow as a Christian, it’s easy to be spiritually lazy. And it’s easy to have a rebellious spirit. We need God’s help to have a willing spirit.

I love the following prayers in the Bible:

*Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. (Psalm 51:10)*

*Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. (Psalm 51:12)*

*Teach me your way, O LORD, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name. (Psalm 86:11)*

*I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. (Psalm 119:10)*

*Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23-24)*

#### **Discussion question**

8. Choose one of the previous prayers that speaks to you personally. How does it speak to you?

## What are your obstacles to growing?

- I am too busy to read the Bible or pray.
- I spend too much time on my smartphone, on the Internet, or watching TV.
- I forget about God for days at a time.
- I get caught up in pornography.
- I think God is mad at me.
- I feel guilty because I have been sinning.
- I feel discouraged or hopeless.
- I am tired.
- I have too much housework.
- My job consumes me.
- I am not very self-disciplined.
- My spouse/relatives/friends would think it's weird if I take God seriously.
- I take drugs or drink too much and can't concentrate on God.
- I get discouraged about my Christian walk.

### Discussion questions

9. Which of these obstacles or distractions are most likely to keep you from growing in God? Explain your answer.
10. How could you overcome these obstacles?
11. Take a minute to pray, asking God to help you overcome these obstacles.

## Do you know Jesus?

This book was written to help believers in Jesus grow in their faith and personal life. You will get the most out of these pages if you know Christ, since it is through his love and power that you can truly change. If you have not yet entered into a relationship with Jesus, let me invite you to accept him as your Savior and Lord. Make this your personal prayer:

*Jesus, I believe you are the Son of God, and I need your help. I confess I have sinned and failed you in many ways. I invite you to be my Savior and Lord, and I ask you to help me follow you the rest of my life. Thank you for loving me, forgiving me, and accepting me as your child.*

If you prayed this prayer, welcome to the family of God. God has plans for you—to transform you. You have an exciting life ahead of you!

## Memory verse

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. (Matthew 5:6)*

## Want to learn more?

### Free online Bible studies

*Studies on growing as a Christian*

[www.dougbrittonbooks.com/resources/Jesus](http://www.dougbrittonbooks.com/resources/Jesus)

### Book by Doug Britton

*Getting Started, Getting Connected*

[www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore/getting-started](http://www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore/getting-started)



5. Would you like to hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matthew 5:6)? If your answer is "yes," write a prayer asking God to help you have this hunger and thirst:

6. List your three greatest obstacles to growing. After each obstacle, write a brief plan to overcome the obstacle.

Obstacle 1:

Obstacle 2:

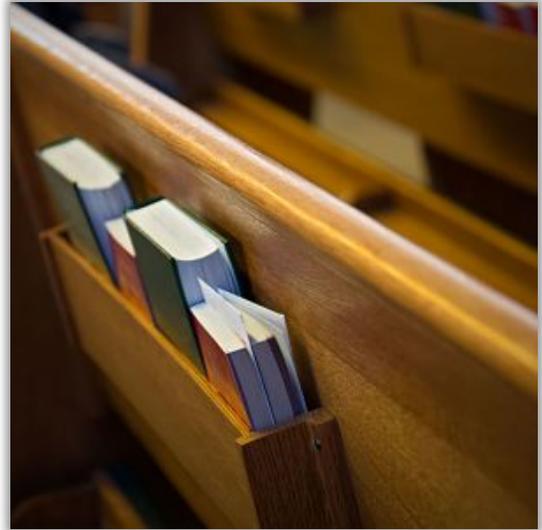
Obstacle 3:

## Day Two: Learn from God

The best way to grow in Christ is to learn from God himself. I love what Solomon said when he wrote, “Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain” (Psalm 127:1). You can’t grow in Christ unless God is building your house (changing you).

In today’s lesson, you will read how to grow closer to God as you interact with him. As you read, remember that you are doing more than just learning information or engaging in spiritual practices. You are allowing God to transform you.

*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:2)*



### Discussion question

1. Is there a difference between learning information and being “transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2)? Explain your answer.

### Spend time with God every day

If you are a basketball player, and you want to learn new skills and stay in shape, there is one key person who can help—the coach. However, no matter how good the coach is, he or she can’t help you very much if you don’t show up for practice.

As a Christian, you also have someone who can help you grow—God. However, if you don’t spend much time with him, you will grow very slowly, if at all.

*Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. (James 4:7-8)*

### Discussion questions

2. How much time do you spend on an average day praying, reading the Bible, or meditating on (thinking about) what you read in the Bible?
3. Do you think you should spend more time with God? Why or why not?

### Make a plan to spend time with God.

Most of us need to make a concrete plan to spend time with God. Otherwise, we tend to think “I will spend more time with God later,” but we rarely get around to doing it.

We all are different, so our plans may be different from others around us. The key is be sure to spend time with God.

**Sincerely seek to grow in Christ. Don't simply be "legalistic."**

It's good to make routine times to read the Bible and pray, but if you aren't careful it's easy to treat these times casually, just another thing to check off on your "to-do" list. If you approach time with God like this, you are being "legalistic"—following instructions outwardly but not actually connecting with God.

Another trap people sometimes fall into is to just read for information, not asking God to speak to them personally.

Your times with God are important. Keep your heart open to hear from God as you pray and read the Bible.

*Show me your ways, O LORD, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long. (Psalm 25:4-5)*

**Discussion questions**

4. What is the difference between reading "legalistically" and opening your heart to God?
5. How can you avoid being legalistic and instead genuinely open your heart to God?

**Choose your "spiritual disciplines."**

There are many ways to spend time with God every day. (These are sometimes called "spiritual disciplines.") Here are some of them:

- Read the Bible daily.
- Pray.
- Pray and fast (miss one or more meals and pray instead of eating).
- Worship God.
- Go on a personal retreat (for example, take one day to pray and read the Bible).
- Go on a church retreat.
- Keep a journal, writing insights from your Bible study and answers to prayer.

**Pray alone daily**

As you can see, there are several ways you can grow in Christ. In today's study, you will read about two key ones—praying and reading the Bible.

Paul wrote, "Devote yourself to prayer, being watchful and thankful" (Colossians 4:2). Prayer is a privilege—an opportunity to communicate with the Creator of the universe and the one who loves you the most. As you pray, you will find yourself growing closer to God.

When you pray, don't think you must use flowery, formal words. It is fine to speak simply and sincerely, as to a good friend.

**Focus (pay attention) as you pray.**

If you are like me, you may have trouble paying attention when you pray. Your mind may drift to problems at work, the grocery list, or glitches in your tennis serve. Three things I sometimes do to help me concentrate while praying are:

- Pray out loud.
- Sing my prayers.
- Walk as I pray.

### **Pray at one or more regular times every day.**

Set aside a time and place for prayer every day, just you and God. You might start with a short amount of time, perhaps five minutes, and let the time grow as you get used to praying. During your prayer time:

- Ask for forgiveness of sins.
- Thank God for his love and ask him to help you love him more.
- Pray to know God better.
- Ask God to help you walk in his Spirit and to serve him throughout the day.
- Ask that your day be a spiritual adventure.
- Pray for your spouse.
- Pray for others.

Establishing a prayer habit is similar to beginning an exercise program. If you are like many people, you do best by starting gradually. Otherwise, your enthusiasm may give out and you may give up.

The benefits of both prayer and exercise are small at first, but they build up over time. If you persist in prayer, you will become more Christ-like, just as if you persist in lifting weights, you will become stronger.

### **Pray throughout the day.**

In addition to praying at a set time every day, begin to pray from time to time throughout the day—praising God, making requests, and thanking him for all he has done for you and others.

#### **Discussion questions**

6. Review the previous suggestions. Which ones will help your prayer life?
7. Make a plan. When and where will you pray each day? How long will you pray?

### **Study the Bible every day**

The Bible is God's word. Reading it gives you information you need and changes you supernaturally.

*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)*

*For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)*

Joshua 1:8 tells us to “meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it.” In Hosea 4:6 we read, “My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge.” Many other verses show us the importance of studying and knowing the Bible.

Too many Christians only encounter Bible verses when they listen to sermons or read Christian books or devotionals. Sermons and books are good, but you also need to read the Bible itself.

### **Make a plan.**

Many people find it difficult to discipline themselves to read the Bible regularly. This was true for me for some time after becoming a Christian. However, I discovered a system that has kept me true to daily Bible reading for many years, even on days when I don't feel like it. The system is simple. I have committed myself not to read online news, watch TV, or listen to the radio until I read the Bible. Since I love to know what's happening in the world, this plan has ensured that I read the Bible.

Others have found different ways to apply the same idea. One man I counseled doesn't put his shoes on until he reads the Bible, because he knows he will not go to work barefoot. A woman I know doesn't make her bed until she studies the Bible.

If you don't already have a regular personal Bible study program, start one. A good place to begin is in the gospel of John. As you read, try to answer questions such as:

- Who is Jesus?
- How does God expect me to live?
- How can I apply this passage in my life?

Then go through the entire New Testament, reading one or more chapters a day. Do not jump around from chapter to chapter or book to book or you will lose your train of thought, just as when you flip through TV channels.

When should you read? There are no rules. I read the Bible every morning because it helps set the tone for my day. Sometimes I also read it after work to help me draw closer to God at night.

Use a translation that is easy for you to understand. Ask someone in a Bible bookstore to show you different versions. If they all seem too difficult, ask to see one written in modern everyday language.

As you read, ask God to help you apply the verses to yourself. Underline, circle, or highlight verses that speak to you. Write notes in the side margins. In addition, memorize selected verses, then meditate on them throughout the day.

You will see yourself change as the word becomes part of you.

### **Discussion questions**

8. When will you read the Bible?
9. Which book of the Bible will you start reading?

### **Memory verse**

*Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. (James 4:8)*





## Day Three: Learn from Others

When you became a follower of Jesus, you didn't just start a one-on-one relationship with him. The Bible says you became part of a "body," for all Christians collectively form one body (1 Corinthians 12:12-27 and Romans 12:4-5).

We are connected and need each other. Others need your love, and you need theirs. You can learn from them, and they can learn from you.

*Pride only breeds quarrels, but wisdom is found in those who take advice. (Proverbs 13:10)*



### **Spend time with other believers**

It's hard to learn from other people when you don't spend time with them. Look for opportunities to grow in a Bible-believing church, small groups, and other ministries.

*Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another. (Hebrews 10:25)*

The early church understood the importance of this. In Acts 2:46, we read that Christians met daily in the synagogue and ate together in their homes.

### **Discussion questions**

1. Are you part of a Bible-believing body of believers who are serious about growing in Christ? Explain your answer.
2. If your answer this question is "no," what steps should you take?

### **Learn from Christian leaders**

The Bible tells us that God has called some people to "prepare God's people for works of service" so the body of Christ will become mature (Ephesians 4:11-13). You will usually find them in Bible-believing churches.

*It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Ephesians 4:11-16)*

Make it a point to identify mature, loving Christians—ones who teach from the Bible—and learn from them. Be sure to find people who are humble and who do not try to control you.

Identifying mature leaders can be difficult, especially when you look for them on the Internet or TV. In general, it's wise to look for mature leaders in a loving, Bible-based local church—one where you can observe how they live and lead.

Regardless of where you look, Jesus gave us a great description of the type of leader you should listen to:

*Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves." (Luke 22:25-26)*

#### **Discussion question**

3. Who are some leaders who help you grow in Christ? How do they help you?

### **Learn from others' praise**

When others praise you, there is a danger that you will become prideful. Yet if you guard against that temptation, praise can be helpful. It can help you identify things you do well. For example, if you tell someone about Jesus and he or she says you made Jesus' message clear, you may want to remember what you said to use another time you share the gospel.

*May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (Galatians 6:14)*

#### **Discussion question**

4. How can you be sure others' praise helps, not hinders, your growth in Christ?

### **Learn from others' suggestions, ideas, or advice**

The older I get, the more I realize that I don't know it all and that I can learn from my brothers and sisters in Christ. As I wrote at the beginning of today's lesson, we are part of one body (the body of Christ), and we need each other.

*Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. (1 Corinthians 12:14-18)*

We need each other, and we can learn from each other. Let's look at some Proverbs that encourage us to listen to other's advice:

*For lack of guidance a nation falls, but many advisers make victory sure. (Proverbs 11:14)*

*The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice. (Proverbs 12:15)*

*Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed. (Proverbs 15:22)*

*Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise. (Proverbs 19:20)*

When you are willing to learn from others' suggestions, ideas, or advice, you can grow in ways you never would have grown otherwise. For example, other believers could help you:

- Understand a passage in the Bible.
- Learn a new Bible-study method.
- Learn a new praise song.
- Discover gifts or abilities you could use to strengthen the Body of Christ.
- Learn how to memorize Scripture.
- Learn more about Jesus' love.
- Realize some changes in your lifestyle that could help you grow closer to Jesus.

#### **Discussion questions**

5. What are some things you have learned from other Christians?
6. How open are you to feedback?
7. Have a few friends made suggestions that you have rejected? If so, should you pay more attention to their comments? Why or why not?

### **Learn from others' criticism and corrections**

It's usually hard to listen to criticism, even when you've done something wrong. It's especially hard if you have tried to do the right thing and find yourself corrected or reprimanded.

*He who ignores discipline comes to poverty and shame, but whoever heeds correction is honored. (Proverbs 13:18)*

*He who listens to a life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise. He who ignores discipline despises himself, but whoever heeds correction gains understanding. (Proverbs 15:31-32)*

*A rebuke impresses a man of discernment more than a hundred lashes a fool. (Proverbs 17:10)*

*Like an earring of gold or an ornament of fine gold is a wise man's rebuke to a listening ear. (Proverbs 25:12)*

*Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses. (Proverbs 27:5-6)*

*A man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed—without remedy. (Proverbs 29:1)*

When someone criticizes or corrects you, you may become angry and defensive, or you may feel hurt and depressed. A better way to respond is to:

- Thank God for the opportunity to grow.

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (James 1:2-4)*

- Listen carefully to see if there is some truth in what is being said.

*My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. (James 1:19-20)*

- Ask forgiveness from God and others if you did something wrong.

*He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy. (Proverbs 28:13)*

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)*

Ask God if there is something you should learn. Of course, don't think you must agree with everything someone said. But remember that even if most of what was said seems wrong—and even if the other person spoke to you in anger—you may receive some valuable information that will help you grow.

If someone says cruel words intended to crush you emotionally, don't take them personally. Instead, see him or her as having a problem. Pray for that person.

*But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? (Matthew 5:44-47)*

### Discussion questions

8. Describe how you normally respond to criticism.
9. Do you think you should respond differently? If so, how do you want to respond?

### Memory verse

*Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise. (Proverbs 19:20)*

### Want to learn more?

#### Book by Doug Britton

*First Things First*

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## Day Four: Learn by Observing

Do you sometimes slip into “cruise control,” not paying attention to what is happening around you? It’s easy to do. Most of us have gone for days (or longer) “just living,” unaware of our emotions and not thinking about God very much. I have slipped into cruise control many times myself.

That’s not how God wants us to live. He wants us to stay alert and be watchful as we go through life.

*The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways, but the folly of fools is deception. (Proverbs 14:8)*

*Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. (Colossians 4:2)*

In today’s lesson, you will read about how you can grow in Christ by being observant:

- Learn from your life experiences.
- Learn from good examples.
- Learn from bad examples.
- Guard your heart.

### Discussion question

1. Do you ever find yourself going through life on “cruise control,” not paying close attention to your emotions or what’s going on around you? Explain your answer.

### Learn from your life experiences

You can learn a lot about God by observing yourself as you go through life. Here’s an example from my own life:

One night at church I heard an evangelist preach about divine healing. He used himself as an example, saying he had thrown away his glasses in faith and that God had healed his eyes.

I followed his example, and I threw away my glasses that night as I “claimed” healing. However, my eyes were not healed. A few months later, my driver’s license expired, and eventually I tried to pass the Department of Motor Vehicles vision test. I failed without glasses. I ended up getting new glasses to pass the test.

I learned that I couldn’t simply “claim” a miracle and expect God to do what I wanted. My faith wasn’t shaken, but I grew in wisdom.

(I should note that twenty years later, I heard the same evangelist speaking in a different church. He was wearing glasses.)



I've learned many more things about God from my own life. For example, I have learned about his faithfulness, I have experienced his forgiveness, and I have seen him do miracles in many people's lives.

### Discussion question

2. Have you learned something about who God is from your life experiences? If so, describe what you have learned.

## Learn from good examples

One way to grow in Christ is to follow the examples of people you respect. You can learn a lot about how to have a healthy Christian marriage by observing the respectful, loving way a mature Christian husband and wife interact with each other.

You can learn a lot about faith by watching someone go through hard times with grace and trust in God. And you can learn about forgiveness by watching someone forgive a friend who stole money from him or her.

I could write a long list of people whose examples have inspired and encouraged me to grow closer to Jesus. For example:

- I have learned a lot about growing in Christ as I have observed the lifestyles of my key pastors.
- I have learned a lot about prayer as I have observed poor people in a small home group pray passionate, heartfelt prayers.
- I have learned about dedication and servant leadership as I have watched pastors and laypeople pour their lives into helping others.

The Bible encourages us to learn from others' good examples:

*Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ. (1 Corinthians 11:1)*

*We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised. (Hebrews 6:12)*

*Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. (Hebrews 13:7)*

### Discussion questions

3. Name three people who have been good examples to you. Explain how their examples have inspired or encouraged you.
4. Describe how one or more of these examples caused you to change your behavior in some way.
5. Describe some ways you would like to be a good example to others.

## Learn from bad examples

Have you gone to a church picnic where a couple loudly argued or parents screamed at their children? Or have you observed a married person flirting with another person's spouse? When you

watch behavior like that, you have an opportunity to learn what not to do. And you have the opportunity to pray for those people.

The Bible doesn't just encourage us to learn from good examples. It also tells us not to imitate bad examples.

*Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evil men. (Proverbs 4:14)*

*Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God. (3 John 1:11)*

This is a difficult topic to write about, because no one is perfect, and there are things I have done I wouldn't want others to imitate. Pray to not have a judgmental attitude, but also pray to learn from others' bad examples.

### Discussion questions

6. How can you learn from someone's bad example without being disgusted by them?
7. Without saying something that would embarrass someone, describe a time you learned something about growing in Christ by observing someone else's bad example.

## Guard your heart

When Jesus confronted the teachers of the law and Pharisees, he didn't confront their outward behavior. Instead, he confronted their values and attitudes. Here's what he said to them:

*Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. (Matthew 23:25-26)*

A key way to grow in Christ is to become aware of your emotions and attitudes. Catch yourself the moment you begin to feel prideful, fantasize about committing a sin, feel envious toward someone, or lust after something you can't afford.

*An upright man gives thought to his ways. (Proverbs 21:29)*

*Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. (1 Peter 4:7)*

*Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. (Proverbs 4:23)*

It's inevitable that you will have temptations that could draw you away from God. Everyone does. Make a habit of catching them early and dealing with them before they grow into outward sin.

*When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. (James 1:13-15)*

### Plan ahead for dangerous situations.

Identify situations in which you may sin. Then plan ahead before you enter a "dangerous" situation.

*Sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it. (Genesis 4:7)*

*Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak. (Matthew 26:41)*

*So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. (1 Thessalonians 5:6)*

**Discussion questions**

8. What does it mean to guard your heart? Explain your answer.
9. How carefully do you guard your heart? Would you like to guard it more carefully? Explain your answer.
10. Say a short prayer asking God to help you guard your heart.

**Memory verse**

*The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways, but the folly of fools is deception. (Proverbs 14:8)*

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## Homework – Day Four

1. Describe something you learned about God by observing your own life experiences:
2. Do you agree we can learn much by observing other people's good examples? Why or why not?
3. Describe what you have learned by watching someone's good example:
4. How can you learn by observing someone's bad example without having a judgmental attitude?







## Day Five: Answer Key to Test (may be removed by leader)

### Note to teachers and small group leaders

Remove this page if you do not want group members to see these answers ahead of time.

### True or false

- F 1. God does not care if you have a pure heart as long as you act right.
- F 2. Someone who makes a plan to spend time with God is very immature.
- T 3. Praying out loud or walking as you pray can help you focus on what you are praying.
- T 4. Reading the Bible once a week is better than once a month.
- T 5. Reading the Bible once a day is better than once a week.
- F 6. Reading the Bible isn't necessary if you watch an evangelist on TV.
- T 7. It's a good idea to identify mature Christians and learn from their examples.
- F 8. If someone corrects you, you have the right to be angry with him or her.
- F 9. Once you become a Christian, you know God and there's no need to grow.
- F 10. It's not a good idea for a Christian to be transformed.

### Memory verses

- 1. Matthew 5:6

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*

- 2. Proverbs 19:20

*Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise.*



## About the Author

Doug Britton, Bible-based Marriage and Family Therapist, has helped hundreds of thousands of people as a therapist, clinical director of a treatment center, seminar speaker, radio co-host, and author of over twenty books that show people how to apply God's truths in their daily lives.

He has also trained pastors, counselors, mentors, and lay leaders in biblical counseling, mentoring, and small group leadership.

Doug and his wife Skeeter live in Northern California.



### Books

Doug has written Bible-based books on many daily-living topics. Visit [www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore](http://www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore).

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### Seminars and retreats

Doug is the founder and president of LifeTree Institute and LifeTree Books. If you would like him or another member of the LifeTree team to speak in your church on any of the above topics, please visit [www.dougbrittonbooks.com](http://www.dougbrittonbooks.com) and click on the "Seminars" link.

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In addition to “The Owner’s Manual to the New You,” Doug Britton has written many more cross-cultural, Bible-based books on leadership, discipleship, and key areas of daily living.

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First Things First  
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