



Spiritual Growth It's About Growing In Christ

"Let your roots grow down into Christ and draw up nourishment from Him. See that you go on growing in the Lord, and become strong and vigorous in the truth."

Colossians 2:7 (Living Bible)

Running Sheet For Programme

Please note, these are approximate times and assume an 11:00am start. To keep the programme flowing you will want the next person or group to be coming up as the previous group is finishing.

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|-------|---|
| 10:50 | Prelude music |
| 11:00 | 2 congregational songs |
| 11:06 | Introductions |
| 11:10 | Welcome and announcements |
| 11:14 | Offering – collected by children |
| | Suggestion: during offering collection, which of course is taken up by the children, have data projector slides of the church family worshipping, families from your church having family worship, parent's reading Bible stories to children etc – different ways of worshipping God. You could tape/video children explaining how they like worship with their families |
| 11:17 | Item |
| 11:21 | Congregational song |
| 11:23 | Prayer – A Teen and Kindy child |
| 11:26 | Congregational song |
| 11:29 | Sermonette 1 |
| 11:34 | Scripture Reading |
| 11:36 | Sermonette 2 |
| 11:41 | Drama – Training in Godliness & Scripture Reading |
| 11:49 | Sermonette 3 |
| 11:54 | Closing song – <i>I Will Never Be The Same Again/Take My Life</i> |
| 11:56 | Children's Ministry person to explain the pot plants and thank children for their work |
| 11:59 | Closing prayer |
| 12:02 | Postlude |

Programme Outline

Introduction

Two children to read this as either a voice over or from the front. While they are reading have children with bags of seeds walking up the church aisle(s) scattering seed on the ground. (We suggest unpopped pop corn as this would be more easily seen and cleaned up at the close of the programme).

- Child 1** Jesus told this story:
- A farmer was sowing grain in his fields. As he scattered the seed across the ground some fell on the path and the birds came and ate it.
- Child 2** The hard path represents the heart of a person who hears the good news about the Kingdom and doesn't understand it; then Satan comes and snatches away the seeds from his heart.
- Child 1** Some seed fell on rocky soil where there was little depth of earth; the plants sprang up but the sun soon scorched them and they withered and died, for they had little root.
- Child 2** The shallow, rocky soil represents a person who receives the message with joy but doesn't have much depth in their life so as soon as troubles and persecution begins because of their beliefs their enthusiasm fades and they drop out.
- Child 1** Other seeds fell among thorns and the thorns choked out the tender blades.
- Child 2** This ground represents a person who hears the message but the cares of this life and a longing for money chokes out God's Word and they do less and less for God.
- Child 1** But some seed fell on good soil and produced a crop that was thirty, sixty and even a hundred times as much as he had planted.
- Child 2** The good ground represents the heart of a person who listens to the message and understands it and goes out and brings many more into the Kingdom.
- Together** Let our lives be like the good soil.

Introduction/Welcome

Choose 4 children varying from about 4 years old to 15 years old and line them up in ages, youngest on the right facing the audience and oldest on the left. The youngest child starts through to the oldest child, then end with the youngest again.

- Child 1** We would like to welcome you to the worship service today.
- Child 2** We'd especially like to welcome our guests. Today is a special day because the

children will be running today's service. We have been practicing really hard and hope that you enjoy worshipping with us. If you are standing next to someone who is a visitor, or someone you don't know real well...please take this opportunity to say a real big howdy and welcome them warmly.

- Child 3** Today we will be looking at what it means to grow spiritually...in other words – what it means to be seed sown on good ground and how we grow a relationship with Christ. Like physical growth, we must grow in our relationship with God. During this programme we hope that you will come to a greater understanding of what having a growing relationship with Jesus really means.
- Child 4** Today we have some special announcements. (This is where you will include your church housekeeping details such as special programmes and dates coming up).
- Child 1** We hope that you have a real happy Sabbath.

Offering

Organise the children to be the deacons this week. Maybe you could collect the offering in something different rather than use the usual offering plates. Use children for music during offering. While offering is being collected show pictures of families in your church spending time in spiritual growth activities. Alternatively, show data projector pictures of the children in your church and some of the adults when they were children (don't forget to label the pictures with their names so the congregation will know whose childhood picture they are looking at).

Item

During the offering is a good time to get a group of children assembled up the front ready to begin their item as soon as the offering is finished. You can choose from songs listed at the end of the programme or the children might prefer to share some of the songs that they are doing in Sabbath School. Adults love to hear what the children are singing in Sabbath School. Often they will have sung many of the songs themselves and will enjoy hearing them again.

Prayer

Choose an older child and a younger child to do the prayer together – thus depicting growth and maturity. Have each child script their own prayer. Encourage them to include in their prayers today's speakers and all the people who are involved in the programme, the importance of spiritual maturity, service projects that have been undertaken by your church, people who are sick and you may think of other things that are relevant for your church that they might include.

Sermonette 1

What Does It Mean To Be Growing Spiritually?

All of us start life as babies – babies need lots of attention and can't do much by themselves (apart from cry for more attention). That's fine and we don't mind because they are babies and most people think babies are cute. However, while most people love babies we worry if they stay small and don't grow. Growing is natural for a healthy baby. In Britain a home has been set up where disillusioned or somewhat unusual businessmen can go and act like babies – complete with nappies. Most of us find such an idea very odd because we are supposed to grow up – we were designed to grow.

We are also designed to grow spiritually. The apostle Paul warns Timothy about spiritual babies who never grow up – some people stay on spiritual milk, they don't grow their hearts toward God and they don't grow into what God has designed them to be.

Today we will be talking about what it means to grow spiritually and how that should change the way you live your life.

Sometimes when we think about spiritual growth we get the wrong idea. Perhaps we imagine a monk living a very quiet and strict life. Perhaps we think of some 'super-spiritual' person who seems to be forever reading the Bible and praying, without some of us kids to look after or a job to get done. Some people think being spiritual involves climbing to the top of a pole and sitting there for a very long time so that they can be closer to God and avoid the things of the world. However, a spiritual life happens in your ordinary, everyday life. At school, with your friends, at your work or at home with lots of kids, where you can grow spiritually. Your spiritual life is God's plan for the way you live all of your life now.

To live a spiritual life means to arrange your life so that you stay connected to Christ, thinking as He thought, speaking as He spoke and walking as He walked. This life will look different for each person but there is a common core – *"Love God with all your soul, mind and strength and to love people as you love yourself."* Mark 12:30-31 (New Living Translation).

When someone asks you how your spiritual life is going, the real question is: 'Are you becoming more loving toward God and people?'

Your spiritual life is your whole life – every minute and detail of it – from God's perspective. God is interested in your entire life. All of the everyday stuff of life can be filled with God's presence – if you are.

In the end, spirituality is all about putting God first in your life - in your ordinary, everyday situations.

The first commandment says: "Put me first, build your life on me". Building your life on God is what spiritual growth is all about.

Points to include if you are writing your own sermonette.

1. *Healthy babies grow – as do healthy spiritual lives.*
2. *Being spiritual is about giving God your life now to grow and change.*
3. *Spiritual growth is about arranging your life in such a way that you can stay connected to Christ.*
4. *Spirituality is about becoming more loving to God and people.*

Scripture Reading

Three children to recite the Scripture Reading and another group of very young children (3-5 yrs) acting out the reading.

All Colossians 2:7

Child 1 Let your roots grow down into Christ
(Group of little children reach down and touch their toes on the word DOWN)

Child 2 And draw up nourishment from Him
(Children reach as high as they can on word UP).

Child 3 See that you go on growing in the Lord
(Children reach wide with their arms)

Child 1 And become strong and vigorous in the truth.
(Children hold up their arms and show their muscles like muscle men)

Sermonette 2

Transformation

When you grow you change. You learn new things that make you act different. You learn to say words so you don't have to point and cry. You learn to eat with a fork so that you don't eat out of your hands any more, you learn how to walk, ride a bike, build really cool toys out of lego and draw pictures with crayons instead of eating them.

When you grow spiritually you also change. The word the apostle Paul uses for this change is 'transformation'. Transformation means to turn into something else. God says that when we allow Him to work in us we really will become a new person. God's purpose is that you don't stay the same spiritually day after day, week after week, month after month and year after year. God wants to grow you. Spiritual growth means we will be transformed into people who become more loving, accepting, forgiving, and caring. We will be growing in our love for God and people.

The apostle Paul reminds us that this transformation happens in our everyday lives. In Romans 12 he says:

"So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life – your sleeping, eating, going-to-work and walking around life – and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognise what He wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you and grows well-formed maturity in you."

These verses tell us that transformation happens when we fix our attention on God and respond to Him. He wants us to be transformed because He knows that is what He made us for and that our lives will only really work best when we allow Him to grow in us.

Paul also calls us Christ's workmanship and reminds us that it is Christ who does the changing. Galatians 4:10 tells us that spiritual growth is all about Christ working in you. 2 Corinthians 3:18 says that by beholding Christ, fixing our attention on Him, we become changed. Our lives gradually become brighter and more beautiful as God enters them and we become like Him.

Points to include if you are writing your own sermonette.

1. When you grow you change.
2. God wants to transform you.

Drama – Training in Godliness

Actors

Bruce	Commentator
Raylene	Commentator
Freeman	Athlete
Joiner	Athlete
Sally	Normal person

Freeman and Joiner are in track suits while Sally is dressed in normal, everyday clothes.

Light comes up on two sports commentators sitting at a table with headphone mics and papers in front of them.

Bruce Welcome back to the Athletics Stadium where the athletes are about to warm up for the women's 400 metres. And Raylene, welcome to the box for this event.

Raylene Thank-you Bruce. Yes, this is one event that I have personally been looking forward to. This will be one of the highlights of these games.

Bruce Well it was your event Raylene – do you ever miss not being out there?

Raylene The feeling just before a big race is incredible, when years of training and race preparation comes down to a few short seconds.

Athletes come out – Freeman and Joiner are stretching, jogging small steps on the spot, Sally is looking around bewildered, she gets an autograph book from her pocket and asks (mimed) the other girls for an autograph to which they are a little surprised, she then gets a camera from her pocket and takes a few pictures of the crowd and then wants to take pictures with the other two girls.

Bruce You would know what these girls are feeling now as they come out onto the track.

Raylene There's our favourite, Freeman – she's looking focused for this one.

Bruce Let's not forget Joiner who is not in her favoured event but still expected to take it right up to the Australian girl here.

Raylene I have had the privilege of spending some time with the Freeman camp and they say she is really pumped for his event.

Bruce And why wouldn't you. She has trained for years for this event.

Raylene She is well known for her rigorous training which has her up before dawn running through the hills of Canberra before weights, track work and more general fitness. You've got to admire the resolve of this lady. She is toned and primed for this event today. She literally has had her eyes on this event, and this medal for years.

Bruce It must be a big occasion – a few butterflies I guess. However, she would

have run this race over in her mind many times. She will have visualized and practised the start thousands of times and I think she's looking good for this one today.

Raylene However it's not a one lady race. You can't go past Joiner. She does pose a serious threat. She is one of the elite US track team and once again she has a reputation for hard work and discipline.

Bruce Well we've already seen this lady's speed in the earlier events. Just look at her muscle tone. She's one of the strongest girls mentally you'll find as well.

Raylene She also has put in the training and she'll be right up there when the prizes are given out for this one.

Bruce One of the interesting entrants to this event is little known Tahbulian runner Sally Tripalong.

Raylene Yes, this quite stunned me to be honest. I have never heard of her country however all reports say she will try hard and that she is a good sort of person.

Bruce For her I think it is quite a life achievement just standing with this line of ladies.

Raylene Mind you she has had athletic success in the past with a report that she ran third in the 200 metres at the Cammoza Primary School Athletics Carnival.

Bruce Yes, I have heard that she will try.

Raylene Her resume in the programme here says she is actually more interested in stitchcraft and amateur photography however, it does say she is a good person and that is why she got the nod when no one else in the country put their hand up for this event.

Bruce When asked about her training schedule she did say she was too busy as treasurer of the local stamp club and that the only nights she had free for training she needed some recuperation time so blobbed in front of the TV instead.

Raylene She did think about this event several times when taking her dog Lucky for a walk but when she broke into a jog Lucky could not keep up so she had to return back to walking.

Bruce Well it does show the spirit of these games that in a professional era of highly monitored training schedules, sports nutrition and mental coaching that this lady still gets to be here on the basis of just giving it a go.

Raylene I'm not sure if it is good for the sport.

Bruce She seems more interested in taking photos of the crowd and the other competitors than getting focused on the event.

Raylene And look at this – she's taking a mobile phone call when we're not far off going into the starters hands.

Bruce Well this really is quite unusual – Sally looks as though she's here for an afternoon stroll rather than taking on the world's best.

Raylene I don't think she is about to trouble the time keepers apart from, maybe, one of the slowest 400 metres in official competition history.

Bruce We'll be back here for the start in a moment after a message from our sponsors.

Three children walk onto the stage to read the message from the sponsors.

Readers Theatre

for Training In Godliness Play

Reader 1 In a race, everyone runs but only one person gets first prize.

Reader 2 So run the race to win.

Reader 3 To win the contest you must deny yourselves many things that would keep you from doing your best.

Reader 1 An athlete goes to all this trouble just to win a blue ribbon or a silver cup.

Reader 2 But we do if for a heavenly reward that never disappears.

All So run straight to the goal with purpose in every step.

Reader 3 Spend your time and energy in the exercise of keeping spiritually fit.

Reader 1 Bodily exercise is all right, but spiritual exercise is much more important and is a tonic for all you do.

Reader 3 So exercise yourself spiritually.

Reader 2 1 Corinthians 9:24-26

Reader 1 And 1 Timothy 4:7-8

Sermonette 3

Training vs Trying

Growing spiritually is not about trying real hard to be a more spiritual person. Paul says instead that we should:

“...rather train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.” 1Timothy 4:7b-8 (NIV).

Paul reminds us that spiritual growth is not about trying harder to grow – it’s about training wisely. This is what the apostle Paul means when he writes to Timothy, a young pastor, and encourages him to ‘train himself in Godliness’. He gave the same advice to the church at Corinth: ‘Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.’

Corinth was the place of big athletic meetings and Paul would have known about how athletes train. For an athlete to enter a competition without training is ridiculous. Athletes train for long hours so that when the competition comes they have grown the right skills and fitness to compete well. It’s the same with me playing the piano (*will have to be changed if the child doesn’t play the piano*). I could try real hard right now to play you the Hallelujah chorus but it would sound very bad – however if I practised and trained then next year I could play something nice.

Paul says that it is the same with spiritual growth. If you are serious about growing then you train yourself in godliness. You shape your life around having God live in you. It means you arrange your life around certain exercises and experiences that will enable God to do in you those things that you are not able to do, even by trying hard.

How do you train in godliness? This will be different for each person because God made us all different. However there are some training tips that many people have found useful. By the way, these training tips are for kids, adults, everybody. There is never a spot that you can say to yourself I can stop training in Godliness now. Many people call these training tips ‘Heart Building Habits’.

(If you have enough kids maybe have each heart building habit below explained by a different child. Extend and adapt the habits to fit your church context and maybe include various opportunities in your church for spiritual growth and mention them.)

Try some of these habits and see which help you to connect with Jesus.

Giving Yourself Thinking Time

Thinking time is about taking quiet, unhurried time – just you and God. Isaiah 40:31 says ‘wait on the Lord’.

Romans 12 – reminds us to guard against letting the world squeeze us into its mould. Quiet thinking time provides time to think about how we are being influenced and shaped.

Arrange a quiet time that works for you and just spend it with God. Sometimes we might say we are too busy or this is a ‘waste of time’, however without quiet time we will spend life chasing the wrong things. Maybe you will need to start off small and gradually increase the time.

Bible Reading

It’s not about just knowing more; it’s about changing our lives. The Pharisees prayed and studied, but they did so in a big headed way rather than looking for a connection with God. You can know that hydrogen and oxygen make water, but that makes no difference if you’re dying of thirst. Knowledge is good, but only if it causes a change that leaves you with a stronger love for God and people.

Read a small section slowly and go over it again to see what God might want to say to you. Take notes as you read if that is helpful. Some useful questions to ask as you read are:

Does this text teach me about what:

- I should believe about God?
- I should praise, thank or trust God for?
- I should pray for myself and/or others?
- It means to have a new attitude?
- Decision I should make?
- I should do for the sake of Christ, others or myself?

Worship

We often think of worship as a programme that happens in the church on Sabbath between 11.00 am and lunch. However worship is about how you live. Maybe it’s listening to a piece of music that draws you closer to God, maybe it’s in nature. Find whatever it takes that brings you to worship God.

Keep a Spiritual Diary

Some people have found keeping a spiritual diary to be very valuable in connecting with God. A spiritual diary might include thoughts about how God is working in your life or what you are learning from the Bible. Maybe it will include thoughts and feelings about God. One of the good things about a spiritual diary is that you can look back and see how God has grown you.

Prayer

Prayer is talking directly to God. Ask Him to grow you. Ellen White says:

Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend. Not that it is necessary, in order to make known to God what we are, but in order to enable us to receive him. Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to him.
E G White, *Steps To Christ*.

Prayer provides a vital, growing connection to God.

Service

Being involved in service to others is a heart building habit that is beneficial to many in drawing closer to God. Thinking about others ahead of ourselves is great in shifting our focus from inward to outward and allowing God to work in and through us.

Challenge

What's Stopping You?

Most Christians would say that spiritual growth is very important but they do not have heart building habits or get too worried about spiritual growth. What is stopping them?

Many times we are distracted by so many other things to do. The story at the start of our service that Jesus told in Matthew 13 explains how the seeds grew differently on different soils. Some seeds got choked by the 'cares and worries of this world'. Maybe we have so much to get done that we forget the most important thing is our relationship with God.

We get too comfortable and just drift, and we go from day to day thinking that eventually something is just going to happen to us. You can drift, get up, go to work, come home, eat, watch TV, retire and die or you can take each moment and say, "God, this is yours – I want to grow".

Through our programme today we hope that you have taken some time to think and will plan your life differently this week so that you can grow into the life that God created you for. Let's not stay spiritual babies – let's grow up in our love for God and the people around us.

Points to include if writing your own sermonette.

1. *Spiritual growth is about training in Godliness.*
2. *Training allows us to do what trying alone does not.*
3. *Training involves developing heart building habits.*
4. *Some heart building habits are...*

Closing Song *I'll Never Be the Same Again or Take My life*

Children's leader thank children and explain the pot plant give aways.

Benediction Child

Postlude Children who play instruments in your church.

End of Programme Give Away (see appendix 2)

Seedlings

Purchase enough small indoor seedlings so that there will be one per family in your church (have a few extras for visitors). Attach the sticker to the pot. Make sure the pot will be big enough to hold the plant for at least 6 months so that the sticker will be a reminder to the family to spend time working on their spiritual lives. Explain the reason for the plant at the end of the church service. You may like to have the children distribute the plants in the church or the foyer. Make sure there is a note explaining the reason for the plant. Families may have missed the explanation in the church so the note can be an extra reminder. Attach it to a stick and push it into the soil around the pot plant.

Song List

PLAY TODAY

Produced by Lyell Heise, Valmai Hill and the Institute of Worship, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Avondale College and SPD.

What the Lord Has Done In Me	Book 1
Breathe	Book 2
Draw Me Close	Book 2
Ancient Words	Book 3

KIDSOURCE

Compiled by Cpt. Alan Price, CA in 1999, Published by Kevin Mayhew Ltd Buxhall, Suffolk.

Abba Father	3
Be Bold Be Strong	17
I'm a Full Time Christian	141
Shine Jesus Shine	237
Seek Ye First	292

THE SOURCE

Compiled by Graham Kendrick in 1989, Published by Kevin Mayhew Ltd Rattlesden, Suffolk.

Change My Heart O God	68
Draw Me Closer	93
I Will Never Be the Same Again	264
Lord You Have My Heart	341
O Lord You're Beautiful	401

THE SOURCE 2

Compiled by Graham Kendrick in 2001, Published by Kevin Mayhew Ltd Buxhall, Suffolk.

Beautiful Lord, Wonderful Saviour	640
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SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH HYMNAL

Published by Review and Herald 1985

All to Jesus I surrender	309
Take My Life and Let It Be	330
Trust and Obey	590

MY FRIEND JESUS

Composed by Janine Max in 2000, Published by maxiPraise, Cooranbong NSW.

Run To Jesus

REACH FOR JESUS

Composed by Kimberly Houliston, Published by Houlico .

My Friend
Reaching Up To Jesus

Background Reading For Leaders

This section provides a short study on the purpose of spiritual growth. It is provided here with a view to having you become immersed in the value and why this is such an important concept to share. As you think through the concept you might generate other ideas that allow you to present this purpose even more clearly in your context.

"Let your roots grow down into Christ and draw up nourishment from Him. See that you go on growing in the Lord, and become strong and vigorous in the truth." Colossians 2:7 (Living Bible)

What is True Spirituality?

Sometimes when we think about spirituality we think of something separate from our everyday reality. Perhaps we imagine a monk living a life of daily rituals and strict discipline. Perhaps we think of some 'super-spiritual' person who seems to be forever reading the Bible and praying, without kids to look after or a job to get done. However, living a spiritual life is just God's plan for the way you live all of your life now.

What Spirituality Is Not

We can end up being all sorts of things in the quest for spirituality.

How many people are radically and permanently repelled from the way by Christians who are unfeeling, stiff, unapproachable, boringly lifeless, obsessive and dissatisfied? Such Christians are everywhere. What they are missing is the wholesome liveliness springing from a balanced vitality with the freedom of God's loving rule... Spirituality wrongly understood or pursued is a major source of human misery and rebellion against God. Dallas Willard, Spirit of the Disciplines.

Obviously it's not supposed to be this way, yet for many it's the sad truth. When people are not being authentically transformed – when they are not becoming more loving, joyful, Christlike persons – they often settle for what might be called 'pseudo-transformation.'

We know that somehow we are supposed to be different but if our heart isn't changing, we will look for more superficial ways of demonstrating that we are spiritual. We might think spiritual maturity is simply about how much biblical information we have acquired. We think we should rigidly immerse ourselves in a host of spiritual practices that will prove how spiritual we are. We end up looking down on people who are not working at their spiritual lives as hard as we are – so all of our efforts end up making us more judgmental rather than more loving. We focus on outward behaviours, making them the test of godliness while ignoring the deeper and more destructive sins of the heart.

By strong will or through pride we can readjust our outward appearance or behaviour. This is not what spirituality is about.

"It is true that there may be an outward correctness of deportment without the renewing power of Christ. The love of influence and the desire for the esteem of others may produce a well-ordered life. Self-respect may lead us to avoid the appearance of evil. A selfish heart may perform generous actions. By what means shall we determine whose side we are on?" E G White, Steps To Christ.

What Is A Right Understanding Of Spiritual Life?

Ellen White continues with this answer.

"Who has the heart? With whom are our thoughts? Of whom do we love to converse? Who has our warmest affections and our best energies? If we are Christ's, our thoughts are with Him, and our sweetest thoughts are of Him. All we have and are is consecrated to Him. We long to bear His image, breathe His spirit, do His will, and please Him in all things."

"... who say they live in God should live their lives as Christ did." 1 John 2:6.

To pursue spiritual life means simply to order your life in such a way that you stay connected to Christ, thinking as He thought, speaking as He spoke and walking as He walked. This life will look different for each person but there is a common core: *"Love God with all your soul, mind and strength and to love people as you love yourself."* Mark 12:30-31 (New Living Translation).

When someone asks you how your spiritual life is going, the real question is: 'Are you becoming more loving toward God and people?'

Your spiritual life is simply your whole life – every minute and detail of it – from God's perspective. God is interested in your entire life. All of the everyday stuff of life can be filled with His presence – if you are. You can do what you're doing right now as Jesus would if He were in your place.

When you are 'abiding/staying connected' in Christ, then Christ promises to work in you. When this happens you just find yourself being the person God designed you to be – the things Christ would have you do become the things you want to do. Jesus promises that by beholding Him change will happen. See John 15.

Transformation

The primary goal of the spiritual life is human transformation. The gospel insists transformation is possible. Often we get content with things being the same today as they were yesterday. We forget God's purpose is growth. We don't expect people will change and are not surprised when they don't. However, the Bible insists that where Christ is at work that person will become 'new'. They will become a more loving, accepting, forgiving, and caring person. They will be growing in their love for God and people.

Training versus Trying

"...rather train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come."

1 Timothy 4:7b-8 (New International Version).

An important key to transformation is realising that it is not a matter of trying harder, but rather training wisely. This is what the apostle Paul means when he writes to Timothy, a young pastor, and encourages him to 'train himself in godliness'. This thought also lies behind his advice to the church at Corinth: 'Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.'

There is an immense difference between trying and training. Trying hard can accomplish only so much. If you are serious you have to enter into a life of training. To enter a life of training means to arrange your life around certain exercises and experiences that will eventually enable God to do in you what you are not yet able to do, even by trying hard.

What Spiritual Disciplines (Heart Building Habits) Are Not

Spiritual Disciplines are not a measure of your spirituality. They are the means by which we develop the fruit of the Spirit. They are as exercises are to the game or practice is to a performance.

Spiritual Disciplines are not necessarily unpleasant. The word discipline has a negative ring but this need not be the case. Remember we are training to live a life that is characterised by the fruit of the Spirit. These are not negative things. The fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control, all of these things are enjoyable, therefore the practices required to develop these fruit can be enjoyable too.

Spiritual Disciplines will not earn God's favour. This is an important point. You already have His favour. These are to help us develop as God's saved children. They are to help us grow towards the life God desires for us.

Keep in mind that these spiritual disciplines do not save you. They are not a pursuit in themselves. The role of disciplines is to allow you to live the freedom of the Christian life.

"Many have an idea that they must do some part of the work alone. They have trusted in Christ for the forgiveness of sin, but now they seek by their own efforts to live aright. But every such effort must fail. Jesus says, 'Without me you can do nothing.' Our growth in grace, our joy, our usefulness all depend upon our union with Christ."
E G White, *Steps To Christ*.

What Spiritual Disciplines (Heart Building Habits) Are

Spiritual Disciplines are any activity that helps me gain the power to live the life Jesus taught and modelled. These are things such as confession, meditation on the Bible and solitude – times where you can be in God's presence and He is given room to grow you.