

CHAPTER 11

Growing in Christ (Smashing Through My Ceiling)

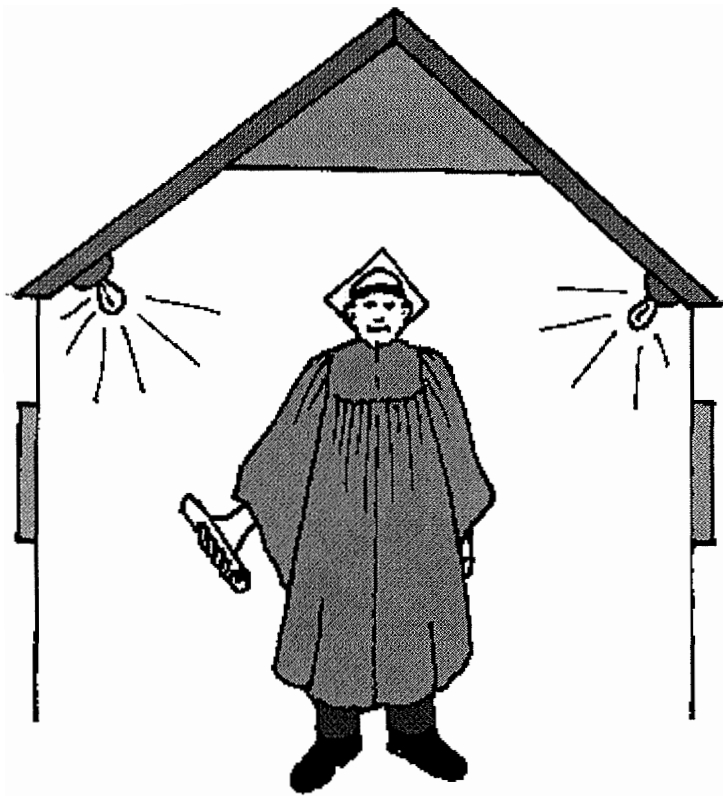
The living God wants us to break through the ceilings which our society has made and which we ourselves have made. He wants us to soar up into the heavens! He does not want anything to hinder or limit our upward climb. A **ceiling** is something which hangs over our heads and keeps us from going any higher. Were you ever in a room where you were able to go higher than the ceiling? You may have had a ladder which enabled you to get up near the ceiling, but how could you have gone higher than the ceiling? Ceilings put limitations and restrictions on how high a person is able to go.

In many primitive societies, people reach a ceiling level at an early age and throughout the rest of their lives they will remain at this level and go no higher. For example, an Australian aborigine may begin to learn to trap and hunt at a very early age. At about the age of 15 he reaches the level of "manhood" where he can hunt, survive and provide for himself and others. He has reached the ceiling and there is nothing higher for him to reach for. He has arrived. People in primitive societies even marry at a young age. It is true that when a young man is 20 he may be somewhat stronger and more experienced as a hunter, but basically he is at the same level that he was five years earlier, and he will stay at this level the rest of his life. His skills may improve, but basically he will be doing the same kinds of things that jungle life requires.



In the above diagram we have a person living in his hut in the jungle. He has learned to be a hunter, a survivor, a provider. He can handle adult responsibilities even though he is still a teenager. He will continue to hunt, survive and provide until he is too old or too sick to do so.

Our industrialized society has also put ceilings over our heads, although we may not reach these ceiling levels until about age 25. We grow and develop, and we look ahead to finish high school and then perhaps to graduate from college. We then seek to get a job, a wife (or husband), children, a home and a car, and then we have finished. WE HAVE ARRIVED! We have reached our level. We have "grown up." We are done and satisfied. We have reached the ceiling and we go no higher.



In the above diagram, we have an average American who has graduated. He now has an education, a diploma, and he is soon to have a job and perhaps a family. He feels he has arrived and reached the end of his journey. He goes no higher than the ceiling that he has set for himself.

Sometimes people say to younger ones, "What are you going to do when you grow up?" This question implies that there is coming a time when the young person will be grown up and will not need to grow any more. We know that physically a person stops growing. A person who is six feet tall at age 20 is going to be about six feet tall at age 60. Some shrinkage may even take place. Is this also true in the spiritual realm? Does God want us to reach a level and then STOP growing?

Consider 2 Peter 3:18: "But _____ (this verb is in the present tense: **keep on growing**,

always be growing, be ever growing, never stop growing) in grace, and in the _____ of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ." Does God want us to reach a certain level and then STOP growing? _____ Does He want any ceiling to get in our way?

God wants to blow apart and rip open that ceiling which limits us and restricts us and keeps us from going higher and upward. When there is a ceiling we are afraid of jumping too high lest we hit our head. God wants us to go way beyond any ceiling. God wants to break it wide open so that we can grow and increase and develop as a person. When it comes to spiritual growth and development, the sky (heaven above) is the limit!



In the above diagram we find a man who is not limited by any self imposed ceiling. He has broken through and the sky is the limit. He wants to go higher and upward. He wants to soar to new heights. He does not want anything to hinder his upward advancement.

In Ephesians 4:15 we learn that the believer is to "G_____ U_____ into _____ in all things (in everything), which is the Head, even _____." God Himself is the CEILING that we should grow up to! God wants us to get to Himself (Who is very HIGH!) and to learn of Him and increase in the knowledge of Him. Man will never reach this ceiling because it is infinitely high. Therefore we must never stop learning and developing and growing and reaching HIGHER and HIGHER.

We should be like a cup which has INFINITE CAPACITY (the ability to hold and contain more and more). We can never say the cup is full. We must always say that the cup still needs more and more. We must never stop drinking from the fountains of God! God wants us to have an EVER INCREASING CAPACITY--to be able to contain more and more of Himself! He must

I _____ (John 3:30)! God must put more and more of Himself into me!

Paul says in Colossians 3:10: "and have put on the new man, which is [constantly and continually being] renewed in _____ after the image of him that created him." Our relationship with God is constantly being made new and fresh as we grow and develop and go upward and onward. Likewise in Ephesians 4:23 Paul says, "and be [constantly and continually] renewed in the spirit of your _____." Our mind is to be ever developing and constantly increasing!

True learning will demand an increase in learning. Proverbs 1:5--"A wise man will hear, and will _____ learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels." If a person does not keep on learning then he has stopped learning. We must ever grow and ever learn! School must never come to an end! Sometimes people think of graduation as the end, when it is really just the **beginning**. The word "commencement" means "beginning," not "ending."

The person who continues to learn and increase and develop is the person who is mentally and spiritually healthy. When a person does not want to learn or thinks he does not need to learn, he is showing how mentally and spiritually unhealthy he really is!

Have you ever heard the expression, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks!" This implies that when a person gets older he can no longer learn new things. Is this really true? If a person stops learning when he gets older, he has no one to blame but himself. As long as God gives us a functioning mind, we need to keep on learning.

God wants everyone to grow and to increase and to "learn new tricks" (to learn new things about an eternal and timeless God). In Colossians 1:10 Paul prays that the believer might be "increasing (growing) in the _____ of God." God wants the believer to be ever increasing and enlarging his mind and filling it more and more with the knowledge of God!

If a person really wants to grow he will. Have you been saved? Have you tasted that the Lord is gracious (see 1 Peter 2:3)? When a person tastes something that is really good, he **DESIRES more and more** (see 1 Peter 2:2)! When a person is first saved he has a taste of how kind and gracious and good the Lord is. As he continues in the Christian life he desires to learn more of God's goodness and grace and kindness.

In a person's relationship with the Lord, things should be ever becoming new and fresh and more and more wonderful and meaningful. For example, when a man is first married to his sweetheart, he says "I love you!" and it is something very meaningful to him at the time. As the years go by, however, those three words should be ever increasing in meaning and the love relationship between husband and wife should be deepening. The word "love" should mean much more to them than it did on their honeymoon.

So it is with our relationship with the Lord! Will we ever fully understand the love of God (Ephesians 3:19)? _____ When are we going to finish searching out God and finding out the depths of our great God and His fathomless wisdom (Romans 11:33)? _____ Even simple things (such as "I'm saved!" "I have eternal life!" "My sins are forgiven!" "God so loved the world." "Christ loved me and gave Himself for me!") should take on new dimensions and new meaning as we grow and increase in the Lord. We should ever be learning and

understanding what these things mean! Something is desperately wrong when the person says, "I know what it means to be saved and I have nothing else to learn!" That person has stopped growing. That person is revealing his own shallowness. That person has hit the ceiling and will go no higher.

The Lord wants every believer to grow up. God wants to deal with every area of our lives, to change us and to renew us and to make us more like Christ. The problem is that there are certain areas that we do not want God to deal with or to touch, and this greatly hinders our growth. For example, consider a person who sees the doctor for a physical check-up. He may not mind having the doctor check certain parts of his body. He may be quite comfortable having the doctor look down his throat and check his pulse, etc. But there may be other areas that he feels very uncomfortable having the doctor check, and there may be certain parts of the body that he doesn't want the doctor to examine, so he says, "STOP! Please go no further, doctor! I don't care if there are certain areas that may not be healthy. I don't want to know about it!" Such a person has put up a ceiling (or wall) and he does not want the doctor to break through. It is quite possible that he is keeping the doctor from finding out something about his body that is very important.

We must allow God to break through any ceilings we have erected! We must let the Great Physician do whatever He wants to do so that we might be spiritually healthy and wealthy in Him. We need to let God examine us anywhere He wants to: "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23-24).

The attitude of too many people (including even Christians) is this: "I've always been this way! I can't change and I don't even want to be different. I'm content with the way I am and I don't want anything else!" For example, they might say the following:

**"I've always been grumpy; why should I change."
 "I've always been worried about this and that. I can't help but worry."
 "I am very shy with people and I always will be"
 "I've always had trouble controlling my temper! I guess I'll be like that until I die."**

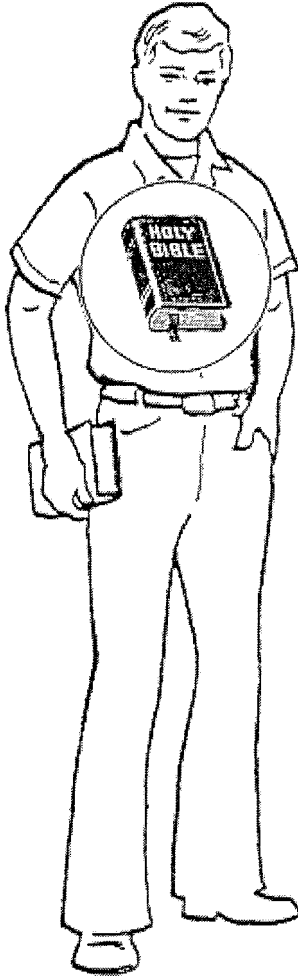
These are all ceilings which people need to break through. God doesn't want believers to stay the same. God is working in us to change us and transform us (2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 12:2). Instead of saying, "Lord, this is how I am and I am going to die this way," I need to say, "Lord, I don't want any more ceilings! I want to go up! I want to change and to correct things in my life and to grow and develop and be all that you want me to be! Lord, I'm going to break through this ceiling by Thy grace and by Thy power!"

In Acts 6:7 and 12:24 and 19:20 what do we see GROWING and INCREASING?

_____ We have been studying how believers grow and should grow, but how does God's Word grow? Often the Bible speaks of God's Word as S_____ (Luke 8:11). God's Word finds good ground to grow in and the good ground is the ready and willing heart of the believer (Luke 8:15).

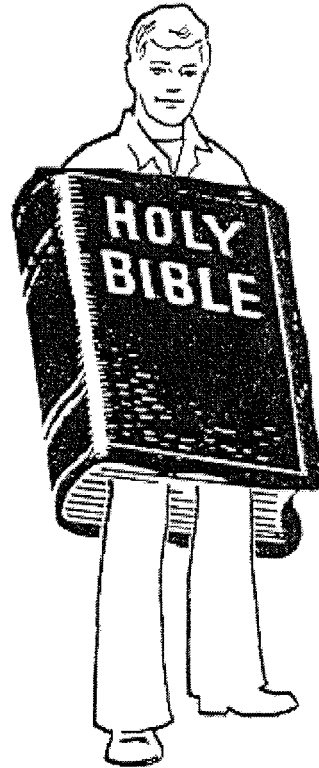
God's formula for SUCCESS is this: His people must be in the Word of God and the Word of God must be in His people. The believers feed on the Word of God and the Word of God does its work in the believer (as it finds good ground in the heart of the believer to take root and grow

and increase). "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe" (1 Thess. 2:13). This is illustrated as follows:



**God's Word Abiding
in the believer
"The Bible lives in me!"**

John 15:7
Colossians 3:16
1 John 2:14
Psalm 119:11
Jeremiah 20:9
(contrast: John 5:38)



**The believer abiding
in God's Word
"I live in the Bible"**

John 8:31
2 Timothy 3:14
2 Timothy 2:15
Psalm 1:2-3
Psalm 119:97
(contrast: 2 John 9)

I feed on God's Word and God's Word will make me grow and increase. God is going to work in me by His Spirit and make His Word increase (as it finds good soil to be planted in and to grow in--see James 1:21 where the word "engrafted" means "implanted." The seed is to find fertile soil in the believer's heart).

Do not worry about others, but make sure that YOU are growing. Make sure that YOU are right with God. The only person who can stop you from growing is YOURSELF. Who is the only person who can keep you (your heart) right with God? _____

Why should I remain immature? Why should I live in spiritual poverty? Why should I be a pauper? Why should I be so spiritually crippled when God wants me so sound and whole? Why should I be such a midget? Why should I not grow up? Why should I not break through the ceiling and go higher and higher into God?

HIGHER GROUND

I'm pressing on the upward way,
New heights I'm gaining every day;
Still praying as I onward bound,
"Lord, plant my feet on higher ground."

I want to live above the world,
Though Satan's darts at me are hurled;
For faith has caught the joyful sound,
The song of saints on higher ground.

I want to scale the utmost height
And catch a gleam of glory bright;
But still I'll pray till heaven I've found,
"Lord, lead me on to higher ground."

Lord, lift me up, and let me stand
By faith on heaven's tableland;
A higher plane than I have found,
Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.

--Johnson Oatman, Jr.

Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high [upward] calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13-14).

Some Take The High Road

