

REVISED & EXPANDED

# THINGS

EVERY  
CHRISTIAN  
NEEDS TO  
GROW

R. C. SPROUL



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LIGONIER MINISTRIES

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To Archie Parrish,  
for his utter devotion to kingdom-focused prayer,  
  
and to Douglas M. Rhoda,  
for his zeal to see this book made available again,  
that Christians might be aided in their spiritual growth.



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## Introduction



It's a worldwide phenomenon. Every four years, the world pauses and holds its collective breath while the Olympic Games take place. Staggered so they occur two years apart, the summer and winter games feature the finest athletes in the world competing in well-known sports such as running, skiing, basketball, and gymnastics, as well as comparatively unknown events such as curling and the triple jump. The athletes come from virtually every nation on the face of the earth, a vast, magnificent display of humanity in all its diversity: different skin colors, different languages, different dress styles, and different lifestyles.

But despite their differences, these national representatives have much in common as they enter the stadium and gather under the Olympic banner with its five interlocking



rings representing unity among the nations of Africa, the Americas, Asia, Australia, and Europe. They all stand together and take the Olympic oath, pledging to uphold the highest ideals of sportsmanship. They all strive to attain the Olympic ideal: *Citius, Altius, Fortius* (Swifter, Higher, Stronger). And they all put their years of training and preparation to the utmost test, going head to head against their fellow competitors.

Being a Christian is not an acquired skill or discipline like diving or ice skating. It is a living, vital relationship with the God of the universe, a relationship that begins when a person becomes a new creation in Him and receives Jesus as Lord by faith. But like Olympic athletes, Christians are called upon to train, to make sacrifices, and to embrace certain disciplines in order to give God “our utmost for His highest.” This book deals with five of those disciplines: Bible study, prayer, worship, service, and stewardship. Just as Olympic athletes work hard to achieve their best performances, our diligence in attending to these aspects of the Christian life will help determine our effectiveness in serving our Lord.

Olympians sweat and sacrifice for years and sometimes decades for the chance to compete and, hopefully,

## INTRODUCTION

win a medal and hear the applause of fans the world over. This stands as a once-in-a-lifetime experience for a select few gifted and dedicated men and women. God's people likely will not receive the world's adulation, but we will someday hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. (1 Cor. 9:24–25)

Enjoy your race.



## Chapter 1



# BIBLE STUDY

**T**he man writhed in excruciating agony. The pain he felt was not physical. He wished it were; he had dealt with that kind of pain before, and he knew he could find relief from it. But this pain required something much greater for its cure. This was a spiritual agony, a darkness of the soul in which he felt suspended by a fragile filament over the gaping jaws of hell. The pain was the shame, devastation, and ruin of personal humiliation brought on by the public exposure of a secret sin.

This man had been a hero, a national celebrity, a noted warrior, statesman, poet, and musician. During his lifetime, he had been the object of popular songs that celebrated his exploits. He had catapulted to national fame when he had championed his people by killing his army's most feared enemy, a monstrous titan, simply with a sling and one smooth stone. He had been a loyal subject of his king, even when that man had sought to kill him. Later, he had become king himself, and his reign had ushered in the golden age of Israel as he extended the boundaries of the nation to unprecedented lengths. Situated on the land bridge that connects Africa with Asia and Europe, through which ran international trade routes, Israel was positioned in a place of strategic geopolitical importance. Under this man's leadership, this tiny country, about the size of the state of Maryland, had become a major world power. But his greatness went beyond politics and culture. He had been a spiritual leader, a man after God's own heart. He was David, the second king of Israel.

When he fell into monstrous sin, it was a calamity not only for David and his family, but also for the entire nation. Despite his spiritual strength, he was so blinded to the evil in his own heart that it took a direct confrontation

by the prophet Nathan to awaken David to his guilt. We read the account in 2 Samuel 12:1–7:

Then the LORD sent Nathan to David. And he came to him, and said to him:

“There were two men in one city, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had exceedingly many flocks and herds. But the poor man had nothing, except one little ewe lamb which he had bought and nourished; and it grew up together with him and with his children. It ate of his own food and drank from his own cup and lay in his bosom; and it was like a daughter to him. And a traveler came to the rich man, who refused to take from his own flock and from his own herd to prepare one for the wayfaring man who had come to him; but he took the poor man’s lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him.”

So David’s anger was greatly aroused against the man, and he said to Nathan, “As the LORD lives, the man who has done this shall surely die! And he shall restore fourfold for the lamb, because he did this thing and because he had no pity.”

Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man!”

FIVE THINGS EVERY CHRISTIAN NEEDS TO GROW

David was grief-stricken at this unmasking, this indictment. Verse 13 says, “So David said to Nathan, ‘I have sinned against the LORD.’” Through Nathan’s words, David was stricken by the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. His repentance was as deep as his fall had been steep. His remorse went beyond a superficial fear of punishment to authentic repentance, a spirit marked by a heart broken for offending God.

In this attitude of contrition, David penned the prayer known to us as Psalm 51. In this psalm, all the elements of true repentance are found:

Have mercy upon me, O God,  
According to Your lovingkindness;  
According to the multitude of Your tender mercies,  
Blot out my transgressions.  
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
And cleanse me from my sin.

For I acknowledge my transgressions,  
And my sin is always before me.  
Against You, You only, have I sinned,  
And done this evil in Your sight—

BIBLE STUDY

That You may be found just when You speak,  
And blameless when You judge. . . .  
Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.  
Make me hear joy and gladness,  
That the bones You have broken may rejoice.  
Hide Your face from my sins,  
And blot out all my iniquities.

Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.  
Do not cast me away from Your presence,  
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.

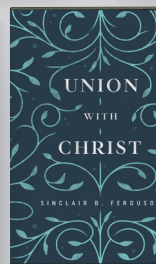
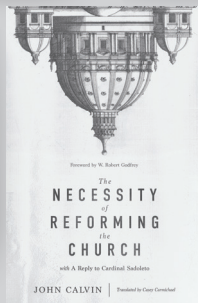
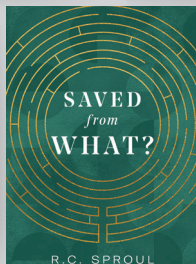
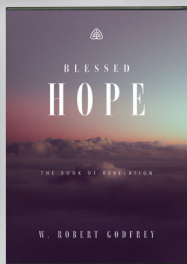
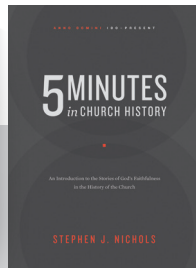
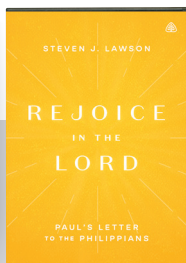
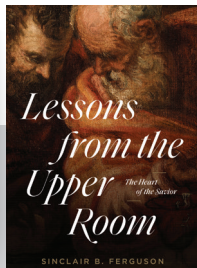
Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,  
And uphold me by Your generous Spirit. . . .

Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,  
The God of my salvation,  
And my tongue shall sing aloud of Your  
righteousness.

O Lord, open my lips,  
And my mouth shall show forth Your praise.



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