

Walk in the Light

*See the light or feel the heat
(Spiritual Growth)*

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Now that you are in God's family, you are expected to grow up into maturity and that is going to involve some changes. It takes courage to let go of habits and patterns that you have come to rely on. The Bible teaches that God is not going to change, so we are without any options. We are the ones who are to make the changes. We are faced with a choice: see the light of God's plan or feel the heat of negative circumstances that force you to seek deliverance. Obedience is always the better option.

It is natural to feel secure in what you have always been doing. In a weird way, you many people are comfortable in old habits where things are predictable, even if the circumstances are not good. However, God sees things differently. He loves you too much to leave you the way you have been. He's committed to your success and wants to you to walk free from old destructive lifestyles.

Things You Need to Know About Change

Most people change only when they feel the heat, changing just enough to get away from their immediate problems. They escape from the heat, get some relief, but are not enlightened to completely break free. They cut off a branch or two, but don't deal with the root issues. The old issues come back after a while. This can be very discouraging. Have you ever painted an old rusty piece of metal? After a while you are back to square one. You have to paint it again.

Still others want to change the circumstances around them to improve their lives, but don't want to change their lives to improve their circumstances. The solution to solving spiritual problems is to work from the inside out, not from the outside in. For example if you are unhappy, going out and buying some new thing at the shops may temporarily get your mind off your circumstances. But very soon the same old ache is there. You have to receive and walk in the Lord's joy that is not dependent on circumstances but on His everlasting and unchanging love.

When you are not prepared to pay the immediate price of change, you will wind up paying the ultimate price. All change requires some discomfort and uncertainty. It's the price you have to pay. You cannot afford to have false hopes about change either. You cannot hope for different results without changing your old habits. To get to where you have never been, you have to do something you have never done before. It takes courage to make changes. Thank God, He has more than enough courage to give those who see the light of a better place, ask for His help and make the necessary changes.

Remember that simply having a desire to change is not enough. In order to enjoy the delight that successful changes bring, you have to undergo the discipline it takes to get there. That is why patience is a virtue you must cultivate. Your ship does not always turn around on a dime. Some situations are quite involved and take time to change. The Bible teaches that through both faith and patience we inherit the benefits of God's promises (Hebrews 6:12). Start making decisions that point you in another direction and be patient. God is faithful.

Encouraging Examples of People who Changed

Gideon had a poor self-image but changed to become God's mighty man of valor. Moses was a man who took matters into his own hand, murdered someone, but was later called to lead a nation. Peter, who started off as an impulsive headstrong fisherman, changed from being like 'shifting sand' to a 'solid rock'. He became dependable and reliable, a pillar in the church. Doubting Thomas changed from walking by sight to walking by faith. Saul was a religious zealot who changed into a super saint under the power of God's word. God gave us all these examples to instill hope in us. Be of good courage. The best is yet to come.

Called to Reign in This Life

There is a purpose behind change. You are called to rule and reign over sin, sickness and all that the enemy tries to throw at you (Romans 5:17). To establish this position of dominion requires change, and change requires growth. To reign as a king over negative circumstances, you have to grow up in the ways of a king. Yes, you have been born into God's royal family, called to serve Him as a royal priesthood, but to enjoy that fulfillment you have to grow up spiritually in that position given to you when you were born again.

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people...

1 Peter 2:9

Dispelling 'Myths' of Spiritual Growth

First, you may be under the impression that spiritual growth is automatic. Simply hang around long enough and things will change. This is just not true. People grow older but not always wiser. Growth is on purpose and intentional. You must desire God's word to grow spiritually.

...as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. 1 Peter 2:2-3

Yet, it is one thing to desire God's word, but this must be followed with a decision to put God's word first place in your life. Value God's word enough to make it your priority. This decision must be supported by disciplined study in order to master what you need to understand.

Second, spiritual growth is not a matter of simply knowing what the Bible says. Mere 'head' knowledge about Bible characters, stories and history, is just the start. Sure, what you know leads to what you believe, but real maturity starts to show when you apply what you know with wisdom. Behavior more than beliefs is a mark of maturity. Convictions are fine, but they must find expression in changed conduct and character.

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. James 3:13

A third myth about spiritual growth goes something like this: spiritual growth is a personal and private matter. That's not what the Bible teaches. Life is about relationships: with God and your fellow man. True growth takes place in community, not in isolation. Jesus called men into a relationship with Himself, and then made them into His disciples. Their growth into close followers came as they related to Him and each other. They did not grow in isolation.

Perhaps there has been a time where you thought that it would be nice to just live and worship God on your own somewhere, away from all the ups and downs of Christian church life.

No, the Bible says that the person who isolates himself is not wise.

*A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire;
He rages against all wise judgment. Proverbs 18:1*

What You Must Know About Spiritual Growth

Spiritual growth is a process that takes time as you gain in knowledge of who you are in Christ, begin practicing the new life you now have, and stand against distractions, deception and temptations. God expects you to grow up into spiritual adulthood. Newborn babies are always cute, no matter how 'messy' they may be, but twenty five year old 'babies' are no longer cute. Still stuck in their selfishness, they become a drain on everyone around them. They are still takers, and have not yet learned to be contributors in their world. This is not God's plan, nor His best. Every Christian is called to reach a stage in their walk with the Lord where they are to bear much fruit for the benefit of others.

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

John 15:7-8

Know that for God's word to 'abide' in you, or settle down and take up residence in your thoughts and actions, your heart has to be open and receptive to it. Like good soil receives seed and strong plants grow up, so must a man's heart be prepared to receive God's Word.

The Bible teaches in Mark chapter four, that there are four types of 'soil' that speak of a man's heart. If the Word falls on soil by the wayside, or the place that has been trampled on, then it won't take root and is immediately lost. You have to allow God to soften those trampled areas of your life and relationships. If you don't, then no amount of good preaching or teaching is going to help. The seed is just wasted.

Then the stony ground speaks of a person who has no depth of character. They are shallow and when the 'heat is turned up', they immediately stumble and the Word they have heard does not profit them either.

The third type of person allows the daily cares of this world and other things to come in and choke the Word they have heard. They have not learnt how to value and thus protect the treasure of the Word in their hearts.

Fortunately, God gives us a picture of what we can be if we realize that danger of not taking care of business in the above three examples. The person who follows through after hearing the Word by truly accepting it, will bear fruit.

But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred." Mark 4:20

The point is, that you have to make a choice to be good soil. It's your call. God has destined you to bear much fruit, but He requires your cooperation! So how do you cooperate with God in the process of spiritual growth?

Practical Steps to Take to Grow Spiritually

Be sure to be **'planted' in your local church** where you are committed to sit under God appointed equipping ministries given to bring you to maturity and strength. Only when you are planted can you develop roots or relationships with other people that will truly establish you in the things of the Lord. You will hear the word, faith will arise, and God will see to it that you become accountable to His Word. As you share your life with all its ups and downs with people around you, you will be strengthened and edified. They have insights into God's ways given to them for your benefit.

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ--from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. Ephesians 4:11-16

Sure, churches have their problems, but you have to learn to trust yourself to God in an imperfect environment. If you isolate yourself, you will cut yourself from the flow of life to your soul. It is by what every "joint" supplies that the body grows and edifies itself. Joints speak of relationships. Really when you think about it, all of life is about relationships in some way or another.

Don't think that you can live life to the full as a Christian simply watching TV in the 'safety' of your home. People who try to go it alone never get as far as they should. Be a part of the solution. Get what God has for you in His community of believers: the local church. Read the book of Acts to see how God used an imperfect bunch of people under tremendous persecution to achieve His aims.

A **second step** that you need to take in growing spiritually is to become a **consistent doer of God's word**. To hear His Word causes faith to arise, but faith must be 'put to work' in every area of your life. Know that God's promises apply to your family, job, health, finances, and even leisure time. In fact, there is no part of our lives where we cannot put the Word of God into practice. If we practice the Word on a daily basis: at home and at work and at large, we will be ready for anything that the enemy may try to send our way. We will be spiritually 'fit' or exercised and able to withstand any trials or test.

The Bible speaks of two types of people, those that hear the Word and do it, and those that don't. They both face the same circumstances, but only one stands up under the storm, the doer of God's Word!

"Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. Now everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall." **Matthew 7:24-27**

God has given us His Word to impart His life, nature and wisdom so that we can glorify Him and enjoy His abundance. Not putting it into practice is like having a huge bank account and not making withdrawals on it. God has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness. We must first know His promises and the act on them in faith. Remember faith is active, not a passive sitting around waiting on God to do what He has already promised to do. No, faith is moving out on what God has said He would do. Obedience therefore is really an expression of your faith.

...receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. **James 1:21-25**

Receive the Word, hear it, but be sure to do it. Blessing is assured!

How Will You Know When You are Mature?

You will notice that you are more stable. You will not be easily tossed to and fro by every spiritual wind of doctrine. You will have stopped looking for quick fixes for your problems by relaying on in this or that doctrinal fad. A doctrinal fad is a teaching that promises great things but does not deliver. Let the wholesome, balanced, complete word become like a pillar to you. It will hold you up, and you will notice a consistency about your walk. Consistency is a sign of spiritual maturity.

You will also start producing fruit for the benefit of other people. You will have moved over into the 'plus zone' where you start making contributions into the lives of others in need. You will no longer be constantly drawing on others to meet your need, but you will have enough of God in you to meet someone else's need. There will be an overflow where you will have become fruitful in your relationships. You can now be relied upon to do your share and thus play a part in the overall growth and strengthening of the body of Christ.

A Word about Confession

The Bible speaks of the power of our confession. In fact Christianity has been called the 'Great Confession' or 'Profession'. Consider what it is that secures our salvation.

But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Romans 10:8-10

What you believe in your heart must find expression in the words of your mouth. This is the spirit or essence of faith: believe then speak! As you continue to read on, take a moment to speak out what you have come to believe from the Word as it is personalized to you.

Taking Possession through Confession

- *Because of what Jesus has already done, I have been chosen by God Himself to be a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, His own special person, called to rule and reign over sin sickness and lack.*
- *I have tasted that the Lord is gracious. He has saved me, forgiven my sins, and I now desire the pure milk of the Word that I might grow spiritually.*
- *By faith I say that I am good soil: I hear the Word, accept it and bear good fruit.*
- *I see the value of being planted in God's 'House' the local church, and I submit myself under the equipping gifts He has given to make me mature. I am being made stable and I choose to be accountable and play my part in strengthening the body of Christ.*
- *I am a wise person because I put the Word of God into practice. Because I do, my 'house' will stand when the storms of life blow.*
- *Lord, I declare in faith that I am a doer of Your Word, not just a hearer only. As I look into the perfect law of liberty, and continue in it, I know that I will be blessed in what I do.*

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