

# Do You Need to Grow Spiritually?

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[ 0 : 00 ] of any area of life where a person arrives at perfection and no longer needs to continue to move forward, grow, improve.

I can't. You think about an athlete, a successful athlete. He or she knows that last week's winning performance will not guarantee a win next game.

And so good athletes, no matter how well they function yesterday, they're going to continue to work, to practice, to get better.

They know what's required if they want to continue to be successful. Now I know we've got some scholars in this room, some of you in college, 4.0.

I always had a 4.0 when you added two semesters together. Some of you, middle school, high school, elementary school, you make all A's. I know some of you do.

[ 1 : 05 ] Well, if you made all A's or that 4.0 last semester, that does not just automatically transfer to this semester, does it?

If you're a good student, if you're a smart student, you know you've got to study now. You've got to work now to maintain, to keep on making those kinds of grades.

Now every Christian, let me rephrase that, every mature Christian knows that no matter how much we grow, no matter how close we are to the Lord, no matter how effective we are in serving Him, we've got to continue on.

We can't rest on yesterday's faithfulness. We've got to grow spiritually. It's a lifelong process. And mature Christians know that.

How do I know? Because the Apostle Paul, one of the most mature Christians we will ever read or know about, he emphasizes in Philippians chapter 3 what a lot of the great saints that you have read about have said.

[ 2 : 18 ] The closer you are to the Lord, the more conscious you are of your own sinfulness. The more conscious you are that you've got a long way to go to be like Jesus.

Philippians chapter 3, verses 12 through 16 is where we're going to look today. Paul is describing how he knows he's not where he needs to be.

And he is going to put forth every ounce of effort that God graciously allows him to put forth to know Christ better, to be closer to Him, and to serve Him, make a difference in other people's lives.

Read with me. Philippians 3, beginning in verse 12. Not that I have already obtained this, or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me His own.

Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own, but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead.

[ 3 : 35 ] I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way.

And if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that to you also. Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

We are moving through the book of Philippians. We're coming to a part where Paul's sort of bearing his soul to us. He's admitting he comes short of where he wants to be and needs to be.

So as we look at this, let's look at it with the idea that through Paul's example, we're going to evaluate our own need to grow spiritually.

And then we're going to come back next week in particular and see how we can actually accomplish a greater, more intimate, more meaningful relationship with the Lord and service to Him.

[ 4 : 50 ] Let's look first now, verse 12. The way to know if you need to grow spiritually. The way you need to grow spiritually. The way to know. We're going to look from Paul's experience.

If you need to grow spiritually. Paul knew that he had not arrived. That he needed to continue to grow because of what was lacking in his life. I want you to note two things.

First, Paul had not obtained his spiritual goals. He says in the first part of verse 12, not that I have already obtained this. This is what he's been talking about in verses 10 and 11 in particular.

We read that last week. What I want us to do right now for sake of time is just look at two of the things that he talked about in verse 10 that he has not obtained.

Look at it in verse 10. That I may know him and the power of his resurrection. Paul had not obtained the goal of knowing Christ like he wanted to.

[ 5 : 52 ] Now I want you to think about what that man said. Paul has walked with the Lord probably for 30 years now. I mean, God has used him in a tremendous way. But what he's telling us here is his relationship with the Lord wasn't as close, as deep as he wanted and as he knew the Lord wanted it to be.

He wanted more. The other goal that Paul had not obtained was to experience the power of God in his life, the kind of power that God had demonstrated when he raised Jesus from the dead.

That's life-changing power, isn't it? Transforming power. So what Paul is doing here, he is describing two of his greatest desires that he has not obtained.

He wants to know Christ and be like him. He wants to know him better. Be more like him. And Paul wants to experience God's transforming power in his own life.

Paul's not perfect. He struggles just like you and me. He's a sinner. I don't know this. This is a guess. But just reading some of the things he said, the way he broke in last week and said, beware the dogs.

[ 7 : 14 ] Paul may have had to battle anger some. Don't you think? And what he's wanting to experience in his life is more of God's transforming power, the kind of power it raised Jesus from the dead to help him to overcome his sins, his failures, to become more like Jesus, but also to be more effective in other people's lives through his teaching and preaching interaction.

You know, Paul was a star in that day in terms of the way the Lord used him. I mean, he was the greatest theologian, the evangelist, the missionary, the church planter.

He went into these places where nobody ever heard the gospel, a lot of them, preached, people believed, they started a church. He got them started. But it didn't take long in a lot of these churches that problems happened.

You know, everywhere there's people, there's problems. Isn't that true? Even in the early churches. And a lot of the things that Paul wrote in his letters was to correct a problem.

And so, one of the things he is praying about, about that, experiencing God's power that brought Jesus from the dead, Paul wants to experience that power to be more effective and maybe in grounding those churches, helping them to get off to such a good start that they didn't have the kind of problems, the future churches he started, like some of the past churches he started.

[ 8 : 56 ] Now, the other reason Paul gave for knowing he needed to grow was this. It's real simple. He was not perfect. Look at the other part of verse 12. Not that I've already obtained this or I'm already perfect.

Paul was well aware. This is not some kind of, you know, he's not sharing a secret here. He knew it and everyone who knew it, who knew him knew it.

He was well aware that he was not perfect. He had not overcome all the struggles in his life. He had not developed Christ-like character to the point that he thought he should.

Now, you may be thinking, well, nobody's perfect. No one or will ever be perfect in this world and that's absolutely true. No Christian will ever reach the point of sinless perfection this side of heaven. No one. Paul didn't. So, what does that mean? What does it mean for you to admit to yourself, well, I know I'm never going to be perfect.

[ 10 : 03 ] I know I'm never going to overcome all the sin in my life, all the struggles. I'm never going to develop full Christ-like character. Does that mean that you ought to just, well, what's the use?

Let's just don't worry about it. If I'm never going to be perfect, if I'm never going to totally get rid of this anger, this mouth, I'm never perfectly going to be able to demonstrate self-control, be kind in situations where it's hard to be kind, what's the use?

We can't do that. We can never just sort of shrug our shoulders and say, if I can't be perfect, I'm just not going to worry about it. That's like saying, well, I'll just not worry if I am angry, if I mistreat the people in my life, if I never truly develop the kind of Christ-like character that will enable me to be a

positive influence in my home and in my circle of friends.

We know better than that, don't we? The fact that we are not perfect means we must always work on overcoming our sinful attitudes and our actions.

We still have got to strive for it. We must always work on developing Christ-like character. Because we'll never achieve sinless perfection does not mean that we should not seek to grow spiritually.

[ 11 : 47 ] It doesn't mean that we should settle and just sort of take it for granted we're going to be mediocre. That is not what you can do and be a faithful Christian.

You cannot walk with God and just resolve yourself to just being bland, mediocre, not too bad, but certainly not more like Jesus.

What Paul said about himself, about his need to grow, understanding his failures, that's true about every one of us in this room. That's why we need to make spiritual growth our priority, a true desire of our heart.

You know, there's a difference between knowing you need to grow spiritually. I mean, let's just, if you're a Christian, only a moron would not understand I need to grow spiritually.

Isn't that right? I mean, nobody in this room is so arrogant as to think, you know, I'm where I need to be. If you don't see, at least see, identify, there's something wrong with you.

[ 12 : 54 ] And a counselor can't help you if you're that far, you know, just that dumb that you don't understand. I am lacking in spiritual growth. But that does not make you desire it, does it?

Does it make you make that a priority? I know I need to lose 10 or 15 pounds because I see it every day.

Right there. I see it. I don't like it. I like to get rid of it. It's not probably good for me.

But I just have to admit, I don't do one thing about it. I'd like to get rid of this gut. But I've not made losing weight, getting in shape, and getting rid of it a priority.

And so, what good does it really do for me to say, I know I need to? Now, your spiritual growth, it's not enough just to know you need to are you making it a priority?

[ 14 : 10 ] Do you have a heartfelt desire to know Jesus Christ better? To be closer to Him? Do you really and truly want to overcome the sin in your life that is preventing you from enjoying closeness with God?

And let's be honest, there's probably some sin in your life if you're not dealing with it, it's preventing you from enjoying some closeness with the people that you live with, that you work with, that you play with.

You know, sins, especially certain sins, relational type sins, they don't just hinder our relationship with God, they hinder our relationships with everybody around us, whether you realize it or not.

And so, we need, in order to please God, in order to be the better husband, wife, parent, child, friend, we need to desire to grow spiritually and overcome our sins and truly develop more Christ-like character.

But let me ask you this, do you also desire to see God's power at work in your life? And that will mainly be, I think, or a lot of that will be in answer to your prayers.

[ 15 : 37 ] I don't know too many real miracle workers. I don't know any. But I do know some people who truly walk with the Lord and they are effective in prayer.

They pray according to God's will. They're seeking God's glory, seeking to honor Him. They're seeking what's best in God's overall plan for their life, other people's lives.

And they pray accordingly and they see people change, situations change. Do you want to see God's power at work in your life, especially in after your prayers?

Let's pause here for a minute. Have you ever thought about how God saved you for the very purpose of making you more like Jesus, enabling you to experience His presence and power in your life?

Well, Paul never forgot how the Lord broke into his life and not only called him to himself but set about to change Paul this way.

[ 16 : 54 ] For those of you who may not know, the Apostle Paul at one time was an enemy of Jesus and the church. He did everything in his power to stop the spread of Christianity. He hunted down Christians.

He had them put in jail. He was responsible for some people being put to death all because they were Christians. On one of his trips up to the town of Damascus to arrest Christians, the Lord Jesus just broke into his life, knocked him to the ground, temporarily blinded him and called him to trust

Jesus as his Lord and Savior.

The Lord broke into his life and completely transformed him, turned him around, set him on a different direction I want you to look at how Paul described, he just alludes to this in the latter part of verse 12 or just to read verse 12.

Paul said, I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Jesus intervened in his life, called him to himself, but the NIV makes that clearer.

Look at this, I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. And then the New Living translation makes it even clearer, I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me.

[ 18 : 33 ] never forget if you're a Christian, you're a Christian because the Lord first chose you out of his grace, out of his love, and called you to himself, to be his child, to be his follower, and he did it for a purpose.

Now sometimes the New Testament describes this call as coming from Jesus. The Apostle Paul's initial call came from Jesus on the road to Damascus.

Well, Jesus himself describes to his disciples how he called them. Look at this. Jesus said to them, you do not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you, so that you might go and bear fruit, fruit that will last.

I mean, Jesus is emphasizing to those disciples, you are a follower of me because I chose you. I called you to be with me, to be mine, and I called you not just to be mine, but to do such a work in your life that it makes a difference in how you live, and you produce spiritual fruit.

You demonstrate that you're mine by the way that you live is what he's talking about. But more often than not, when the New Testament describes our call, it describes it as coming from God the Father.

[ 20 : 10 ] A good example is Romans 8, 29, and 30. I want you to look at this. For those whom he foreknew, talking about God, for those whom he, God the Father, foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

And those whom he predestined, he also called. And those whom he called, he also justified. And those whom he justified, he also glorified. Strong emphasis on God's work in us to call us to himself.

But what I want us to note in this is that God's call is always for a purpose. Jesus said, look at it again, I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit, fruit that will last.

God the Father, his call, look at it, for those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son. If you are a Christian, and you look at this, what these statements say, you should take comfort in knowing that God just out of his grace and mercy and love chose you.

He called you to be his child by trusting in Jesus as your Lord and Savior. You didn't deserve it.

[ 21 : 43 ] You didn't do anything to earn it. Your salvation was completely a gift of God's grace.

I want you to look at a couple of verses that should be real familiar to most of us in this room, but it emphasizes what we're talking about. It's important for us to get this and let it sink in.

Paul says, for by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing. You don't save yourself. It is the gift of God, not a result of works.

so that no one may boast. We're chosen, called, saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, but it's equally important for us to understand that we're chosen for a purpose.

Look at the very next verse in Ephesians 2. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

[ 22 : 56 ] Saved by grace, through faith, through faith in Jesus, but we're saved to work, to fulfill the purpose God created us for.

Go back to what Jesus said. He chose us, he chose his disciples to bear fruit, fruit that will last, and God chose us and is working in us to conform us to the likeness of his son.

As we live in this world, as husbands and wives, parents and children, employers and employees, athletes, musicians, or whatever it is that we are and do, God calls us to be his faithful children who do all kinds of good works that are evident to everybody, that we bear forth all kinds of good fruit that's obvious we're children of God, and that we are growing and becoming more and more like Jesus every day in terms of character development.

Now, none of us have done that perfectly for one single day, and what that means is we've got a lot of work to do. The good news is that God will help us both inwardly by giving us the desire, the

motivation, and he will help us outwardly by enabling us to see some success, to make progress. We looked at this a couple of weeks or a few weeks ago, Philippians 2.13, for it is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. See, salvation is all of grace. God chooses us, calls us, and he works in us by his grace to give us the desire and ability to please him.

[ 24 : 43 ] We have every reason to be confident that we can grow spiritually. You, if you're a Christian, I don't care who you are, what you do, how much is going on in your life, if you're a Christian, you have every reason to be confident that you can grow spiritually.

So let's start looking now at what spiritual growth results. Number two, the way to respond is, and I've changed this, this has been on the screen, the way to respond is when you get serious about growing spiritually.

As I said, everybody knows they need to grow if you're a Christian. We're going to look at now the way to respond when you get serious about growing spiritually.

I want you to look at the action words that Paul uses to describe the effort that he put forward to be what God has called him to be. Look at this, in verse 12, I press on to make it my own.

13, straining forward to what lies ahead. Verse 14, I press on toward the goal for the prize. You know, should know, Paul's not talking about working for salvation, but he is talking about disciplining ourselves and cooperating with God as he works in us to make us more like Jesus.

[ 26 : 10 ] Let's go back to that example about me needing to lose weight. Do you know the reason why I have not lost this gut even though I'd like to?

Be honest. I'll just be honest. I have not exercised any self-control or personal discipline in what I eat at night between supper and bedtime.

that's my downfall. I know that. I love to eat potato chips. I love little Debbie square cakes.

If Will and Olivia don't get them all, I love to eat one of those at night. Now, some nights after supper, I start thinking, I'm not going to do that tonight.

I'm not going to eat a single chip. I'm not going to eat one little cake. But at some point, I hear little Debbie calling my name. At some point, these, what would you call them, fat cells start crying out for potato chips.

[ 27 : 24 ] that's a silly illustration, I know. But it can shine light on the spiritual warfare, the real serious warfare that every Christian experiences.

Paul describes it in Galatians 5, 17. I want you to look at this. This is what's going on in every Christian life. For the desires of the flesh, that could be translated sinful nature. That's what he's talking about.

For the desires of our sinful nature are against the spirit, the indwelling Holy Spirit who is seeking to make us more like Jesus. For the desires of the flesh are against the spirit, and the desires of the spirit are against the flesh.

For these are opposed to each other to keep you from doing the things that you want. Your sinful nature does not want you to grow spiritually.

That's why you have so many temptations to do sinful things. I mean you think about it. The temptations that you encounter. You know what your weaknesses are, what we might call pet sins are, what some of those habits that really bring you down.

[ 28 : 34 ] You know what they are, and you know how often you get tempted by that. But you know sometimes we're tempted to allow neutral things to distract us and take us away from things that really matter.

Give you an example. Sometimes on Saturday mornings or other times during the week, I will sit down to read the Bible. And as I sit down to read the Bible, if I didn't do this the night before, it can be early in the morning, I'll think.

If it's during football season, Friday, if it's on Saturday morning, I wonder if Pickens won last night. I wonder if the team I'm sort of keeping up with in college, I wonder if they won last night.

I wonder this and that. Nothing in the world wrong with it. And I want to be honest with you, sometimes I'll pull out that phone or open up that computer and I'll check the scores.

But when I do that, I don't just see if Pickens won. I keep up with all high school teams in upstate at least. I'll look at every score.

[ 29 : 46 ] I'll look at everything on ESPN about college football. And before you know it, the times pass, I got something else I've got to do. And my temptation wasn't to do something sinful in and of itself, check scores, but it was sinful for me to give in to that distraction and take me away from

spending time with the Lord when I had just that time to do it.

We've got to be on guard. The only way we can overcome the sinful nature is to be sensitive to the presence of the Holy Spirit within us and then be obedient as He leads us.

Look at this. The verse before what we just read, Paul says live by the Spirit, walk by the Spirit. Be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's presence and obedient to His leadership.

Walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. That's the NIV. That takes discipline. And that's what Paul is telling us in verses 12 through 14 that we're going to come back and look at in more detail next week and some other things.

But right now I want to close by just a simple question. Do you want to grow spiritually? Not do you know you need to because if you are a Christian you know it.

[ 31 : 14 ] Do you really want, do you desire to grow spiritually? Do you want to develop more Christ-like character? Do you really want to please God by doing His will?

Be honest. God knows the desires of your heart. If you don't want to grow spiritually, if you're not willing to make the commitment and discipline yourself, ask God to help you understand why it's that way.

If you have never, and the whole thing I'm preaching about this morning, it's just a turn off to you. You have no desire to grow spiritually. You can't be a Christian.

The Spirit of God cannot live in you and never convict you, prompt you, encourage you to draw closer to the Lord, to serve Him more faithfully, to overcome the sin in your life.

That just will not happen. But it could be that you are a Christian and you have those desires.

[ 32 : 25 ] And you used to do something about it. But you've allowed the busyness of your life, other people, other demands, or sinful habits to quench the Spirit.

You've not acted on it, and so the desire has dwindled. dwindled. I want you to understand that's serious.

When you have sensed the closeness of God, the presence of God, but you don't now. I would encourage you, if that's you, spend some time with the Lord today.

Admit your sin, your selfishness, your preoccupation with whatever else it is that has hindered you, gotten in the way of your relationship with the Lord. And draw back close to Him.

Ask Him to help you to rearrange your schedule, to make some new priorities, and to make Him first on the list as far as spending time with, getting to know better, becoming more like Jesus.

[ 33 : 48 ] Think about, where are you right now in your relationship with God? Where do you need to be? Make the commitment to obey God and move in the direction He's calling you.

Let's pray together. Dear God, first I pray for anyone in this room who is not a Christian. Maybe you just revealed it to them today or maybe they've always known.

But Lord, I pray that you will convict them, show them their need for salvation. Create within them a desire to turn from their sin, to truly trust Jesus as their Savior and Lord, and surrender their lives to Him and follow Him.

Father, if there are Christians in this room whose desire is not as strong as it used to be, disturb them over that, cause them to realize that they're on shaky ground, and call them back in confession, in repentance, in renewed commitment.

Whet their appetite, dear God, for the things of God. Father, for Christians in this room who are mature, who are growing, who desire to grow more, encourage them, dear God.

[ 35 : 30 ] Encourage them when they see the closer they get to you, the more aware they are of the sin and shortcomings in their life. Help them to see this is a sign of being a mature Christian, being more like the Apostle Paul.

And help them, dear God, to just keep on, to remain faithful, and to see how you do enable them to become more like Jesus, love you more, and serve you more effectively in the days to come.

It's just all an attitude of prayer, listen to the Lord, and respond to Him this morning. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.