



Global College of Ministry

EXPLORE

The Christian & Personal Development

A Journey Worth Taking

“But we Christians have no veil over our faces; we can be mirrors that brightly reflect the glory of the Lord. *And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him*”
(2 Corinthians 3:18, *TLB*).

Spiritual growth is a continuous process of becoming like Christ.

Have you ever stood beside an athlete and thought, “Wow, he is strong! He looks fit! I wish I could be like him. What does he eat?” It’s not just the diet that makes him strong. It’s what he does after he has eaten that really determines his level of strength and performance.

Strength comes through training. The more you use your muscles the stronger they become. If you want to run a ten kilometer race you would start by learning how to run one kilometer. Once you built enough strength and endurance for one kilometer you would keep adding until you reached your goal. As you consistently exercise, your muscles develop and physical transformation takes place. In time, this change is noticed by everyone. Those who have not seen you for awhile will quickly notice the change while those who are with you often will not observe an immediate transformation but rather see continuous improvement in your build, endurance and overall health.

That’s how it is with our spiritual lives. We are in a long distance race from earth to glory and none of us become fit overnight. Paul said, “You also must run in such a way that you will win. All athletes practice strict self-control. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run straight to the goal with purpose in every step. I am not like a boxer who misses his punches. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should” (1 Corinthians 9:24-27, *NLT*).

None of us are at the same place in our spiritual journey, yet all of us should be following a spiritual compass that is pointing to Christ. When we follow the directional indicator of spiritual growth, we begin a lifelong journey of drawing closer to God and reflecting His glory through our lives. James A. Berkeley said, “My life was given to me to spend for God. I have no intention of hoarding it or wasting it, but I intend to spend this one life wisely.”

In this lesson we are going to look at five components of spiritual growth. These components are necessary to start, continue, and finish the journey.

1. Desire Growth
2. Set Realistic Goals
3. Commitment to the Process
4. Honest Assessment
5. Good Role Models

COMPONENT #1: DESIRE GROWTH

Spiritual growth is positive change that begins with desire and is God's way of causing us to mature on a continual basis so we reach our full potential in Christ. Unless we have the will to change, nothing will happen.

In the same way an athlete desires to improve through training, Christians must desire to grow in spiritual matters. This is natural for most believers as they begin their new life in Christ. However, as time moves on some reach a certain level of maturity and lose their desire for growth. Thinking they are strong enough, fit enough, and fast enough, they feel no need to continue the process of development. They become satisfied. This is a very dangerous place to stay because after a while we stagnate and in the end live far below the level God intended.

God's Word teaches the necessity of growth for spiritual transformation.

- ❖ As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2, *NKJV*).
- ❖ "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18, *NKJV*).
- ❖ "And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall" (2 Peter 1:5-10).
- ❖ The mature, productive, powerful Paul never thought himself to have reached perfection. He was always growing – forgetting past successes and failures – pressing on to greater accomplishments.

"I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection! But I keep working toward that day when I will finally be all that Christ Jesus saved me for and wants me to be. No, dear brothers and sisters, I am still not all I should be, but I am focusing all my energies on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us up to heaven" (Philippians 3:12-14, *NLT*). Christ must be our first and foremost desire, our ultimate prize.

COMPONENT #2: SET REALISTIC GOALS

James Allen said, "You are today where your thoughts have brought you. You will be tomorrow where your thoughts take you."

"Just as we cannot come back from a place we have never been to, we cannot reach a goal we do not have. Setting realistic goals can help you take charge of the direction of your spiritual life and shows that you are serious about improving your spirituality." (www.iwhome.com/spiritualquest)

Sunday morning preaching alone will not get the job done. We must have spiritual developmental goals. "Writing down concrete goals crystallizes your thinking. It shows you are serious about improving your spirituality. Otherwise, your good intentions are just wishful thinking. Too many Christians spend more time and effort planning their vacation than they do the development and direction of their spiritual life." (www.iwhome.com/spiritualquest)

The goals you set serve as guideposts directing you towards maturity in Christ so you can grow up in Him (Ephesians 4:15). In setting your goals, try not to set them so high that they become difficult to reach. For example, if you are struggling with prayer don't begin with a one hour prayer session. Start with ten to fifteen minutes. It sounds small, but when practiced yields wonderful results. After a while you will be easily running one kilometer of prayer each day.

There are many valuable goals worth establishing. Let me mention four spiritual goals that I believe need to be at the top of anyone's list.

❖ Plan a regular time and place for prayer.

"But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly" (Matthew 6:6, *NKJV*).

The obvious open reward is answered prayer but there is another reward that we sometimes miss – the evident spiritual growth that we experience as a result of consistent prayer. Some of these discernible signs would be an increased sensitivity to the Master's voice, greater insight into the challenges of life, and a stronger relationship with God.

If we do not plan to pray everyday it simply will not happen. Over time our spiritual man will become weak and when we try to minister in the spiritual, we may be shocked to find we are endeavoring to accomplish this through the flesh.

❖ Set a regular time for Bible study and reading.

Jesus answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4, *NKJV*).

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:6, *NKJV*).

Just as proper nutrition is necessary for physical growth. A consistent diet of God’s Word is vital to our spiritual growth. Jeremiah said, “Your words are what sustain me; they are food to my hungry soul” (Jeremiah 15:16a, *TLB*).

When it comes to regular Bible study, lay out a systematic plan that allows you to gain more and more knowledge of God’s Word. You may choose to study the Bible book by book or you could study different themes or topics in the Bible such as repentance, water baptism in Jesus name, Holy Ghost, faithfulness, prayer, fruit of the Spirit, stewardship, and love. You could also choose to study certain words or verses in the Bible. As you continue your journey of spiritual growth you will use many different methods, the important thing is to be consistent with your Bible studies. In the end, consistent effort produces consistent results. Success in God’s Kingdom comes through submission to His Word (1 Thessalonians 2:13) so “**Study** to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

The Bible is the greatest book you will ever read. In fact, there are sixty-six remarkable books that come together to make one life-changing Book whose words will last forever (Isaiah 40:8; Matthew 24:35). Yet, during your time of Bible study do not overlook the value of reading great books in addition to the Bible.

“Great books will broaden your world, sharpen your mind, inspire your heart, and develop your skills.” (Adapted from *Good to Great in God’s Eyes*, Chip Ingram) Great books allow you to see how relevant God’s Word is to your life and ministry, leaving you equipped and empowered.

❖ Be consistent with church attendance.

“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25, *NIV*).

True spiritual growth cannot be achieved independent of the Body. There is a certain aspect of personal growth that can only take place when we are properly connected to the body of Christ.

If we try to develop spiritually without the supply and strength of the Body, in the end we will be deficient and our growth will be hindered.

❖ Live a lifestyle of evangelism.

Jesus came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). He said, "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at

liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD" (Luke 4:18-19, *NKJV*).

Then Jesus said, "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you" (John 20:21, *NKJV*). It is God's plan to use those reached to reach others.

"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (Mark 16:15-18).

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

We are instructed and empowered to evangelize! If we fail in our goal of lifestyle evangelism then our spiritual growth will be underdeveloped and incomplete.

COMPONENT #3: COMMITMENT TO THE PROCESS

For many of us, setting goals is not difficult. Out of our desire to know and please God more we set goals. But then we struggle to follow through, even to the point of discouragement, because we do not see the visible changes in our lives. "Sometimes when we read the words of those who have been more than conquerors, we feel almost despondent. I feel that I shall never be like that. But they won through step by step, by little bits of wills, little denials of self, little inward victories by faithfulness in very little things. They became what they are. No one sees these hidden steps. They only see the accomplishment, but even so, those small steps were taken. There is no sudden triumph, no spiritual maturity. That is the work of the moment." (Amy Carmichael as quoted in *Holy Sweat*, Tim Hansel)

Spiritual growth is a deliberate act of obeying God's Word. It's faithfully taking those little steps that transforms us into the image of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18). Regardless of where we are in our journey, there is always the need to mature in Him. It is not a one day, one week, or even one month workout. It is a lifelong journey of becoming more and more like Jesus. Men and women of character are not born, they are developed. So "let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:1-2).

COMPONENT #4: HONEST ASSESSMENT

Throughout the journey remember to "Check up on yourselves.... Do you feel Christ's presence and power more and more within you?" (2 Corinthians 13:5, *TLB*).

Spiritual growth requires an honest assessment of self. The best way to accomplish this is through personal interrogation. How am I doing in this growth process? Is my knowledge of God's Word better than it was a year ago? Am I achieving my goals? Do I set a good example for others to follow? Am I truly becoming like Christ? What are the detectable spiritual traits being produced as a result of my development?

The apostle Paul shows us the traits or actions that should become visible in our lives as we progress on our spiritual growth journey. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). The old habits and personality traits that marked your life before Christ are passing away and you are being transformed into a new creation as a result of submitting to God's Word and Spirit.

THE TRAITS OF NEW CREATIONS IN CHRIST – REMEMBER IT'S A JOURNEY... (Taken from <i>The Word in Life Study Bible</i> ~ NKJV, p. 2119)	
1 Corinthians 13:3-8 Love... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Suffers long ▪ Is kind ▪ Does not envy ▪ Does not parade itself ▪ Is not puffed up ▪ Does not seek its own ▪ Is not provoked ▪ Thinks no evil ▪ Does not rejoice in iniquity ▪ Rejoices in the truth ▪ Bears all things ▪ Believes all things ▪ Hopes all things ▪ Endures all things 	Galatians 5:22-23 The fruit of the Spirit is... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Love ▪ Joy ▪ Peace ▪ Longsuffering (patience) ▪ Kindness ▪ Goodness ▪ Faithfulness ▪ Gentleness ▪ Self-control
Philippians 4:8 Meditate on whatever things are... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ True ▪ Noble ▪ Just ▪ Pure ▪ Lovely ▪ Of good report ▪ Of any virtue ▪ Praiseworthy 	Colossians 3:12-16 Put on these things... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tender mercies ▪ Kindness ▪ Humility ▪ Meekness ▪ Longsuffering (patience) ▪ Bear with one another ▪ Forgive one another ▪ Above all, put on love ▪ Let the peace of God rule in your hearts

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Be thankful▪ Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly▪ Teach and admonish one another▪ Sing with grace in your hearts
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Spiritual growth is a continual process of reducing the actions of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21) and increasing the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Applying God's Word to our lives is important! Remember, it's not just your diet but what you do after you have eaten that makes all the difference.

You can faithfully study the Bible but not apply it. This becomes dangerous because knowledge increases responsibility. James wrote, "Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins" (James 4:17, *NIV*). During our time of honest assessment we need to ask ourselves a tough question, "Am I applying what I am learning?" There should be visible growth for all to see. The fruit of the Spirit speaks about the nine attributes that should characterize the life of a true Christian who walks in the Spirit. One man suggests that "these are not individual 'fruits' from which we pick and choose. Rather, the fruit of the Spirit is one nine-fold 'fruit' that characterizes all who truly walk in the Holy Spirit. Collectively, this is the outgrowth all Christians should be producing in their new lives with Jesus Christ." (www.allaboutgod.com) The fruit of the Spirit is a physical manifestation of a believer's transformed life and pours forth from a lifestyle of submission.

We must apply what the Spirit and Word teaches. "Application is hard work because it requires serious thinking. Application is hard work because Satan fights is viciously. Application is hard work because we naturally resist change." (*Bible Study Methods*, Rick Warren, p.37)

John Milton once said, "The end of all learning is to know God, and out of that knowledge to love and imitate Him." The whole purpose and reason for wanting to take this journey is so we can know God better, love Him more, and be like Him in all areas of life. If this is not happening, we must identify the hindrances and remove them.

COMPONENT #5: GOOD ROLE MODELS

All of us imitate others. It's just natural. Imitation, some say, is the highest form of flattery. The only problem with imitation is that we must be careful who we imitate – make sure they are good role models that inspire. The apostle Paul said, "Keep on imitating me, my brothers. Pay attention to those who follow the right example that we have set for you" (Philippians 3:17, *TEV*). He admonished the believers at Philippi to, "Put into practice what you learned and received from me, both from my words and from my actions. And the God who gives us peace will be with you" (Philippians 4:9, *TEV*).

Paul did not settle down in a comfort zone nor did he allow past mistakes to discourage him from pressing on. He continually referred to the compass and found direction for spiritual

growth that guided his life and ministry. He was committed to the process and left us an example to follow. "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1, *NKJV*).

Following a good role model does two things...

1. Shows us what is possible.
 - ❖ A good role model shows us different aspects of spiritual growth that can and should be evident in our lives.
 - ❖ The following scriptures show us how one of the "sons of thunder" can become the apostle of love: Mark 3:17; Luke 9:54; 1 John 4:7-8.
 - ❖ Another example is seen in Acts 4:13 where "unlearned and ignorant men" boldly proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ.
2. Teaches us how to reach the same goals.
 - ❖ Experience a productive ministry and relationship with God (Philippians 4:9).
 - ❖ Endure hardships with purpose (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

Since we are natural imitators we need to find and also be good role models. "Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God" (3 John 11, *NKJV*).

Every believer needs to continually grow throughout their journey from earth to glory. Ascending into the presence of God is a progressive climb. Spiritual transformation does not take place overnight. It is a process of becoming that involves spiritual planning and persistent follow through. Yet, as long as you desire growth, pursue lifestyle changes, honestly evaluate your progress and apply God's Word to all areas of your life, you will become more and more like Jesus.

Some tourists, looking to the top of a very high mountain, thought it would be easier to climb a smaller one. Their reasoning? With a lot less effort they could still improve their view. However, their guide encouraged them to make the challenging climb. On the way they passed a group coming down, and asked, "Is it worthwhile?" Someone replied, "Anything above the ordinary level is always worthwhile." Your view of God and life will keep getting better as you stay committed to the process of spiritual growth. Every step you take in obedience to God's Word and leading of His Spirit will draw you closer to Him. It is truly a journey worth taking.

Study Questions

1. List the five (5) components of spiritual growth mentioned in this lesson, and briefly explain each.

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____

5) _____

2. List and briefly explain four (4) spiritual goals recommended by the author. Support your answer with Scripture.

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____

3. List the fourteen (14) traits of new creations in Christ as found in 1 Corinthians 13:3-8.

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1) _____ | 8) _____ |
| 2) _____ | 9) _____ |
| 3) _____ | 10) _____ |
| 4) _____ | 11) _____ |
| 5) _____ | 12) _____ |
| 6) _____ | 13) _____ |
| 7) _____ | 14) _____ |

4. List the thirteen (13) traits of new creations in Christ that we are commanded to put on in Colossians 3:12-16.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____
- 6) _____
- 7) _____
- 8) _____
- 9) _____
- 10) _____
- 11) _____
- 12) _____
- 13) _____

5. List and briefly explain the two (2) things a good role model does for you.

1) _____

2) _____

The Problem of the Heart Is the Heart of the Problem

“For thy heart is not right in the sight of God.”
(Acts 8:21)

“To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned
back again into Egypt.” (Acts 7:39)

“Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your
fathers did, so do ye.” (Acts 7:51)

In 1 Samuel 9 the man of God has a heart to heart talk to a young man named Saul. He told him, “...tomorrow I will let thee go, and will tell thee all that is in thine heart.” (1 Samuel 9:19) Samuel anoints Saul as the captain over his inheritance, the king of Israel. He prophesied, “And the Spirit of the Lord will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them, and shalt be turned into another man.” (1 Samuel 10:6) As Saul walked away, “God gave him another heart.” (1 Samuel 10:9) As he was celebrated as the king, “there went with him a band of men, whose hearts God had touched.” (1 Samuel 10:26)

Three short chapters later Saul develops heart problems. He is found with a big man complex and a loss of his dependency on God. God’s control of his heart got smaller and smaller. This happened in only two years. He offers a burnt offering presumptuously (that means, when it wasn’t his business to do it.) That day Samuel has a different prophecy for the big man. “But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee.”

(1 Samuel 13:14)

In 1 Samuel 15:22-23 we see how Saul rebels again and this time forces God out of his heart. Saul spared Agag and the best of the sheep, offered the oxen and lambs and did not obey in utterly destroying the enemy. This was a manifestation of rebellion; as the sin of witchcraft,

and also stubbornness that is iniquity and idolatry. (1 Samuel 15:23) Samuel then left Saul and did not return to him again. The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul.
(1 Samuel 16:14)

After God's Own Heart

Saul's successor was a young man called David who was described as a man "after God's own heart."

"And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfill all my will." (Acts 13:22)

"Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7)

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9)

When Adam and Eve fell in the Garden of Eden, their heart was greatly affected - it became filled with evil. This is why Jeremiah was able to give the testimony in the Scripture above.

Jeremiah's question was "Who can know it?" This is asked concerning the heart. Jesus Christ looks on the heart and is a heart specialist.

Jesus, the Heart Specialist

"And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us. And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith." (Acts 15:8-9)

"And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen." (Acts 1:24)

"...for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7)

"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)

Luke 8:4-15 records Jesus' parable of the sower. Each type of soil represents the different types of hearts of the recipients of the Word.

Type of Soil

Type of Heart

Wayside	<i>Hard Hearts</i>
Stony Soil	<i>Shallow Hearts</i>
Weedy Soil	<i>Cluttered Hearts</i>
Good Soil	<i>Whole hearts</i>

We allow the Word of God to be choked out of our hearts by chasing after:

- ✓ cares of this world
- ✓ deceitfulness of riches
- ✓ desires for other things
- ✓ pleasures of this life

These things take up our time, waste our money, and divide our loyalty. We stop these **“weeds”** from crowding into our lives by hiding the Word of God in our hearts.

“Thy word have I hid in mine heart that I might not sin against thee.” (Psalm 119:11)

“A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.” (Ezekiel 36:26)

While visiting a house in a village a missionary noticed that the floor was very dirty. He contemplated asking the owner of the house to clean up the floor. As he sat there pondering the situation it occurred to him that the floor was MUD. The more the floor would be scrubbed the worse that it would become. That is the same way with the hearts of men. The corrupt and sinful nature of man will not allow for improvement. The more you scrub it; the dirtier you realize it is. The only solution is for the heart to be made new. “Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” (2 Cor. 5:17)

Heart Writing

The Bible records four times where God writes.

- ☐ Ten Commandments
(Exodus 31:18)
- ☐ Handwriting on the Wall
(Daniel 5:5)
- ☐ Wrote On the Ground
(John 8:8)
- ☐ Writes upon hearts

(Hebrews 8:10)

We must yield ourselves to Jesus the Heart Specialist; allow Him to give us a new heart; to write His laws on our hearts as we hide His Word there. We must keep our heart clean and tuned into the Spirit and cleave unto the Lord.

“Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” (Proverbs 4:23)

“...And exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.” (Acts 11:23)

A Prayer From the Heart

“Create in me a clean heart, O God: and renew a right spirit within me.” Psalm 51:10

Study Questions

1. Why did the Spirit of the Lord depart from Saul? _____

2. Who was a man “after God’s own heart”? _____

3. How does God look at a person? _____

4. How is this different from the way that we look at a person? _____

5. How is the “heart” described in Jeremiah 17:9? _____

6. What was David’s prayer in Psalm 139:23-24 and Psalm 51:10? _____

7. What does each type of soil represent in the parable of the sower? _____

8. What are we promised according to Ezekiel 36:26? _____

9. When does this take place? _____

10. When are the four times that God wrote as recorded in the Bible?

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____

11. In which ways can we allow the Word of God to be choked out of our lives? _____

12. What should we hide in our heart so that we will not sin against the Lord? _____

Additional Notes

You Can Make It

“But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus...”
(Acts 20:24)

“...endure afflictions...”
(2 Timothy 4:5)

“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.”
(2 Timothy 4:7)

Life as a Christian can be compared with the story in Mark 4. We hear Jesus say, “Let us pass over unto the other side.” (Verse 35) We often think that the Christian walk is going to be the easy road, free from problems and trials. When we get in the middle of the journey across, we realize that there is a “great storm.” (Verse 37) The winds and the waves begin to beat against our boat. We wonder, like the disciples, “Where is Jesus now? Is He asleep?” When we find Him in prayer, we exclaim, “Master, don’t you care that we are about to perish? Our boat is going down!” Jesus stands up in the midst of our problems and says, “Peace be still!” Once again we are left thinking, “What kind of God is this? Even the winds and the waves of our problems obey Him.”

From the story in Mark 4 we realize a number of things:

- ⇒ Jesus wants us to go over to the other side. (Read John 14:1-4)
- ⇒ He controls the storm.
- ⇒ We won’t drown.
- ⇒ Our boat will not sink.
- ⇒ He is in the boat with us.

“They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; These see the works of the LORD, and his wonders in the deep. For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit’s end. Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven.” (Psalm 107:23-30)

Jesus never promised us a trouble-free life. He did say, “These things I have spoken unto you that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33) We will have problems and trials but the difference is that Jesus is there and He will help us to overcome them.

“Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all.” (Psalm 34:19)

“...Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.” (Psalm 30:5)

The Bible encourages us to “...endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” (2 Timothy 2:3) In fact “...he that endureth to the end shall be saved.” (Matthew 10:22) Do you remember the advice that Winston Churchill gave? “Don’t ever, ever, ever, give up!”

“...No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:62)

Paul looked at the Christian life as running a race (Hebrews 12:1-2). He talked of finishing his course (Acts 20:22-24; 2 Timothy 4:7) and compared it to fighting a fight.

When John wrote to the seven churches in Revelation we repeatedly find, “...He that overcometh...” or “...to him that overcometh...” (See Revelation 2-3) In 1 John 2:13-14 we read “...Ye have overcome the wicked one....”

In Acts 27 we find another story about boats. After they had set out, a strong wind and storm arose. The people on the boat started casting the cargo overboard. The crew on the boat were so fearful that they all were fasting. Paul saw an angel who told him, “Fear not!...” (Acts 27:24) Paul promised the others that the boat would be lost but not the crew if they stayed in the boat. “...Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.” (Acts 27:31)

You will pass over to the other side (heaven) if you stay in the ship (the church).

Watty Piper wrote an interesting children’s book entitled *The Little Engine that Could*. This book has been a children’s favorite for more than fifty years. Adults can also learn a valuable

lesson from this book. A little train wanted to climb the mountain to take toys to the children on the other side. It needed an engine to pull it over the mountain. First a lovely new engine was asked to help but refused because it only pulled passenger trains full of people. Refusing to give up, the little train petitioned a freight engine. The freight engine refused because it pulled trains full of big machines and was tired. The little train, determined to make the journey over the mountain, inquired of a rusty old engine, "Please, kind engine, won't you pull us over the mountain?" The rusty old engine was exhausted and said, "I'm too old and very tired. I just cannot. I cannot. I cannot!"

Finally the little train saw a little blue engine. It didn't have much strength, but the little train asked anyway, "Little engine, can you help us over the mountain?" To this the little engine replied, "I've never been over the mountain and I do not have a lot of strength. However, I will try!" As the little engine pulled the little train up the mountain he repeated, "I think I can! I think I can! I think I can!" As he slowly went over the top of the mountain he started saying, "I thought I could! I thought I could! I thought I could!"

Those that think "I can!" and those who think "I can't!" are usually both right.

The other engines in the above story had the same disease as ten of the spies in Numbers 13 who said "We cannot!" But other two spies had a different attitude and said, "We can! Let us do it at once!"

The Israelites looked at Goliath and said, "We cannot!" David said, "I cannot, but God can!" (See 1 Samuel 17)

**"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."
(Philippians 4:13)**

John Maxwell, in his book *The Success Journey*, relates a story that took place in Mexico City in 1968; the year they had the Olympics there. An Ethiopian won the marathon race. The crowd was thrilled and cheered for him as he ran through the finish line. The crowd lingered, waiting for the last of the runners to come through. It was getting dark and one by one they started leaving the stadium. As they were getting up to leave, they heard the sirens and turned to see one last runner of the twenty six-mile race. This runner, from Tanzania, was wounded and had his leg bandaged. He continued limping, in obvious pain. The crowd was overwhelmed and loudly cheered when he passed over the finish line. Reporters asked him why he didn't quit, since he knew that he had already lost the race. He said, "My country did not send me to Mexico City to start the race, they sent me to finish the race."

"...The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong..." (Ecclesiastes 9:11)

Max Lucado relates in one of his books, how he was told that in the filming of *Ben Hur*, the main character had a problem learning how to drive a chariot. This man was expected to drive the chariot in a race. He practiced and practiced but still was concerned. He explained his doubts to his Director, "I think I can drive the chariot, but I'm not sure that I can win the race."

The Director responded, "You just stay in the race and I will make sure that you win."

That is much like it is with Jesus. He expects us to stay in the race, and he will make sure that we win, and reach the other side. In Jesus, we are all WINNERS!

God Said, "Go On."

God said, "Go on! Don't quit!
Your work is not in vain.
I'll always go with you
To strengthen and sustain."

I said, "God, I'm convinced
That I don't walk alone,
But there are days when I
Lack courage to go on."
God said, "Go on! Don't quit!
Remember, I love you;
Victory is just ahead,
AND I WILL SEE YOU THROUGH."
Perry Tanksley

**God Said, "Go On!"
Victory Is Ahead
YOU CAN MAKE IT!!**

Study Questions

1. How can the Christian life be compared to the story in Mark 4? _____

2. What can we learn from this story? _____

3. In Psalm 107 what did those in the ship do to be delivered out of their troubles? _____

4. What does 2 Timothy 2:3 tell us to do? _____

5. How did Paul look at the Christian life? _____

6. When John wrote to the seven churches in Revelation, what did he repeatedly say? _____

7. In Acts 27, the crew would be saved only if what happened? _____

8. What lesson do we learn from the "Little Engine that Could?" _____

9. As far as accomplishments are concerned, who is usually correct, those that say "I cannot!" or those that say "I can?" _____

10. What did the Olympic runner from Tanzania say when questioned? _____

11. What did the Director tell the main character of "Ben Hur?" _____

Additional Notes

Keeping On Keeping On

“And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake: but he that shall endure unto the end,
the same shall be saved”
(Mark 13:13).

Introduction

The definition of *endure* is “to tolerate, suffer, or survive.” The key word here is “survive.” Survival speaks to us of some trouble, difficulty, or disaster. One does not speak about surviving a party. This word is used when speaking of floods, earthquakes, or accidents where people come out alive, and able to continue.

The same is true with our spiritual walk: we endure when we survive the rough places, trials, and temptations we encounter as we travel the road of life. As with a race, it is not the one who begins, but the one who completes the journey, who receives a reward.

In his book, *The Success Journey*, Dr. John Maxwell tells the true story of a special race. The year was 1968, and the place was the Olympic Games in Mexico City. The marathon race is a grueling competition, and the runner from Ethiopia won amid cheers and shouts of victory. Several hours later, a light drizzle of rain began to fall, and the fans decided it was time to go home. They thought all the runners had come in. Just as they began to leave, the sirens of the police escort were heard in the distance. Could it be? Someone was still running. They strained their eyes to identify the lone man who came limping painfully across the finish line – at least two hours after the race was won. He was the runner from Tanzania. Upon investigation, it was learned this young man had sustained a serious injury and had been running with his leg bandaged. He was obviously in much pain, and the reporters could not figure out why he had bothered to continue running when the trophy had already been given. They asked him, “Why did you keep running when you were injured?” His reply is a testimony to us all: “My country did not send me to the Olympics to start; they sent me to *finish* the race.”

Our God did not bless us with His Spirit for us to give up but He intended for us to *finish* the race.

Endurance – Through Difficulties

God’s Word promises many blessings for our faithful endurance. However, it does not promise no pain or suffering, until we get to heaven. Jesus, our perfect example knew what it meant to “endure.” “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of

The Old Testament has many examples for us to look at and gain encouragement.

God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds" (Hebrews 12:2-3). Jesus was giving us an example to follow, so we would know what He expected.

Jonathan – the son of King Saul: This young man is mentioned just a few times in the Bible, but each one proves his faithfulness and loyalty to the things of God. It was through no fault of his that the kingdom was lost. His father became proud and sinned against God in sacrificing a burnt offering to the Lord. This was the duty of the priest – the man of God – not the king. God refused to hear Saul's prayers because of this sin. Even then, Saul did not repent, but was only concerned with a show of his religion rather than obedience to the commandment of God (1 Samuel 13:8-14).

The Philistines had gathered themselves together against the army of Israel, and they were a great host. The Lord is always greater than our enemies. He is always looking for someone who will inquire of His voice. Jonathan was such a man. He saw the desperate situation they were in, but was more concerned with fighting the battle than with the difficulty. He told his armor bearer to follow him, believing God would help them defeat the enemies of His people. The passage they had to follow to reach the Philistine camp was between two sharp outcroppings of rock – a difficult way indeed. But this did not stop them. 1 Samuel 14:6 says:

"And Jonathan said to the young man that bare his armour, Come, and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised: it may be that the LORD will work for us: for there is no restraint to the LORD to save by many or by few."

When they reached the place where they could see the army of the enemy, they stopped to inquire of the Lord, and decide how they would go about this thing. Jonathan told his armor bearer, "Let us reveal ourselves to them and if they say 'wait, we will come to you' then we shall stand still. But, if they say, 'Come up to us,' then we will go up because then the Lord has delivered them into our hands. This shall be the sign to us." Guess what? The most difficult way was God's way.

God went with them and gave the victory. Jonathan and his armor bearer slew about twenty men (two against twenty is a tough fight) and then the Bible tells us that the Lord sent an earthquake. The Philistine army began to flee. God does not need numbers to win the victory – He needs someone who will put their trust in Him and *keep on keeping on!*

Daniel – a slave in Babylon: The story of Daniel is a familiar one, but we need to remember when this story began. Daniel, still a teenager, was captured and taken from his home in Jerusalem to the court of King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. His dependence and faith in God were evident from the beginning of his captivity. Daniel refused to eat the king's meat (meat offered to idols), but was wise enough to suggest an alternative plan that would not cause the king's other servant to get into trouble (Daniel 1:8-17). Daniel showed his concern for others very early in his story.

Throughout his long career in the court of many kings of Babylon, Daniel kept the faith. It was certainly not easy. He suffered and went through many trials, but his *endurance* kept him faithful to the end.

The New Testament Teaches Endurance Also

There are many examples of endurance through hardship in the New Testament, especially after the birth of the church in the book of Acts. As one of the first missionaries, Paul is a prime example of a life of hardship, with a victorious, faithful end. Here is what he says about his life journey:

“Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren: In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches (2 Corinthians 11:24-28).

“Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then am I strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10).

After all these things, Paul still had the testimony of endurance: “For now I am ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

Strength for Endurance Comes From God

Another Old Testament prophet, Isaiah, spoke of the ability to endure hardship.

“Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? There is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isaiah 40:28-31).

God knows the way that we take. He understands that it is not easy. But He has promised to be *with* us; even *in* us, and we can make it!

“When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee” (Isaiah 43:2).

How is He in us? “To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27).

Conclusion

God has given us everything we need to finish the race:

- His Word to guide us,
- His Spirit within us, and
- A hope of heaven waiting for us.

“You’re going to find that there will be times when people will have no stomach for solid teaching, but will fill up on spiritual junk food – catchy opinions that tickle their fancy.

They’ll turn their backs on truth and chase mirages.

But you – keep your eye on what you’re doing:

accept the hard times along with the good:

keep the Message alive:

do a thorough job as God’s servant.

You take over.

I’m about to die.

My life an offering on God’s altar.

This is the only race worth running. I’ve run hard right to the finish, believed all the way.

All that’s left now is the shouting – God’s applause!

Depend on it. He’s an honest judge.

He’ll do right, not only by me, but by everyone eager for his coming”

(2 Timothy 4:3-8, *The Message*).

Study Questions

1. Define and briefly explain the meaning of the term “endure.” _____

2. Write out the verses that prove the statement “Jesus, our perfect example, knew what it meant to endure.” _____

3. Given the following Old Testament examples, write a brief explanation and support with Scripture the idea that these encourage us to endure through hardship.

1) Jonathan – the son of King Saul _____

2) Daniel – a slave in Babylon _____

4. Write out at least two New Testament Scriptures that encourage endurance through hardship.

1) _____

2) _____

5. List the three (3) things God has given us to help us endure to the end and finish the race.

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

Additional Notes

The Lord Is With You!

“And the night following the Lord stood by him...”

Acts 23:11

“For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee...”

Acts 18:10

Like Paul we sometimes become apprehensive over our circumstances and what will happen to us. Scripture records that the Lord appeared to Paul three times to comfort him. This does not refer to his presence that is everywhere (omnipresence) but is talking about a close relationship and a special closeness in a time of need. (Psalm 46:1;121:1)

Jesus came to the earth to be with us. His name was to be called, “Emmanuel” which means “God with us.” (Matthew 1:23) Even though He has ascended back into heaven He has returned to us through the Holy Spirit. He said, “lo, I will be with you alway, even unto the end of the world.” (Matthew 28:20) Because you have the baptism of the Holy Spirit you have “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” (Colossians 1:27)

As we go forth preaching everywhere the Lord works with us, confirming His Word. (Mark 16:20)

Jesus is there in every situation of our lives. He continues to watch over us, bless, help, and protect us. He stands with us and strengthens us. An African song reveals His nearness to us. “I have a great big God; He’s always by my side; A very big God; By my side, by my side.”

Therefore, Paul was able to tell Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:17-18, “Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear...And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work.”

To Moses, God said, “...Certainly I will be with thee...” (Exodus 3:12) When Joshua took over the leadership of God’s people God promised, “There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee or forsake thee. Be strong and of a good courage...” (Joshua 1:5-6) This same promise is given to all of us as we struggle on the road of faith.

God promised the children of Israel and all of us today, “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.” (Isaiah 41:10)

God loves us and has permitted us to enjoy so many blessings. “.Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I

will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee...Fear not, for I am with thee..." (Isaiah 43:1-3,5)

Where Is God?

- Micah 2:13 God is before His people.
- Ps. 139:5 God is behind His people.
- Deut. 33:12 God is above His people.
- Isa. 40:11 God is beneath His people.
- Ps. 125:2 God is around His people.
- Matt. 1:23 God is with His people.
- Isa. 12:6 God is in the midst of His people.
- 1 Cor. 3:16 God is in His people.

God is not only by our side, but He also carries our burdens while carrying us.

"When a pedestrian with a heavy load is picked up by a motorist, he puts his burden down in the car; he does not keep it on his shoulder. The God that can carry you can carry your load. So cast all your care upon Him for He careth for you." (Vance Havner)

Footprints in the Sand

(A well-known story is told that illustrates how the Lord is always with us.)

One night I had a dream. I was walking along the beach with the Lord and across the skies flashed scenes from my life. In each scene, I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand. One was mine and one was the Lord's.

When the last scene of my life appeared before me, I looked back at the footprints in the sand, and to my surprise, I noticed that many times along the path of my life, there was only one set of footprints; and I noticed that it was at the lowest and saddest times in my life.

I asked the Lord about it; "Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you, you would walk with me all the way. But I noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life there is only one set of footprints. I don't understand why you left my side when I needed you most.

The Lord said, "My precious child, I never left you during your time of trial. When you see only one set of footprints, I was carrying you."

In Greek mythology the super strong Atlas is depicted as carrying the world (globe) on his shoulder. He is pictured as bowing under the weight of the world, shoulders drooping, and face

contorted from the pressure. However, our God carries the weight of the world on His shoulders but is not affected by the pressure.

At times we become troubled with situations in our lives, and we stoop under the weight of the pressure. We need to remember that God is willing to carry our burdens on His shoulders. "Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?..." (Isaiah 40:28) Handling problems was part of Christ's job description: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder..." (Isaiah 9:6)

We need to be like the man that was so troubled by his circumstances that he went into the forest to ponder his plight. As he lamented over his troubles he finally took a piece of paper and wrote, "I resign as the General Manager of the universe" and signed his name. He stated, "And God accepted my resignation!"

The songwriter put it aptly, "If He carries the weight of the world upon His shoulders, I know my brother that He will carry you!"

Study Questions

1. What does "Emmanuel" mean? _____
2. What do we learn from "Footprints in the Sand"? _____

3. Isaiah 41:10 says, "I will _____ thee. Yea, I will _____ thee."
4. Isaiah 43:1-3,5 says: "I have _____ thee." "I have _____ thee by name." "I will be _____ thee."
5. What happens when a motorist picks up a person who is carrying a load? _____

6. What do we learn about God in this? _____

7. In Isaiah 9:6, what part of His job description tells us He carries our problems on His shoulder? _____

