

## **GRADUAL GROWTH** by Gary Henry submitted by Pam Lenza

“. . . 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” (Ephesians 4:13).

WE ARE AN IMPATIENT PEOPLE, AND WHEN THINGS NEED TO BE FIXED, WE PREFER THEM TO BE FIXED QUICKLY. If there are problems, we demand instant solutions, and we have little tolerance for delay in obtaining the results we seek. In our culture, the concept that some plan might take a *lifetime* to be accomplished is unthinkable. Long before that, we would have concluded that the plan wasn't working — we would have changed plans.

Spiritual growth, of course, does take time, and we need to be more patient than we often are, both with other people and with ourselves. But I suggest that what we really need is to be more *humble*. We must put our pride in its place and be willing, perhaps for quite a long time, to be novices or beginners. Between us and God, there is a long road to be traveled. All who've gone before have had to make the journey. Should we be exempt? If we're expecting God to provide us a shortcut, who do we think we are?

But we also need *courage*. Our Lord's own journey took Him through painful territory, and He endured all of it patiently, humbly, and courageously. So the Hebrew writer says, “Consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin” (Hebrews 12:3, 4).

At the present time, none of us is anything more than a work in progress. Our characters are unfinished and not yet ready for direct communion with God. But we're on the way to that goal, if indeed we've obeyed the gospel of Christ and are remaining true to the confession of our faith. Each day God's hammer and chisel are at work on us, chipping away at the sin that has hardened around our hearts. Since we're still alive and able to talk about it, one thing ought to be obvious: *God has not given up on us!* And neither should we. Eventually, God's methods, however ineffective they may seem right now, will be seen to have been the best. Meanwhile, let's trust the process and give it time — nothing less than a *lifetime* — to work. It may be slow, but it's very, very sure.

“Knowing God and developing faith is a gradual process. There are no shortcuts to maturity. It takes time to be holy” (Erwin W. Lutzer).