

Taking Time to Grow

Like most other important things, spiritual growth takes time. It doesn't happen while we sleep, nor does it occur in the background while we're engaged in other pursuits. To grow spiritually, there are some definite activities that must be engaged in (such as Bible study and prayer), and these activities take time. If we're not willing to set aside the time that these things require, we need not think that spiritual growth is going to happen.

Growth is essential. While we certainly do have the option whether to be a faithful Christian or not, if we've chosen to be a faithful Christian, we don't have the option whether to grow or not. Either we grow and keep growing throughout our lives or we die. There is no safe plateau we can reach where further growth is unnecessary.

Peter urged us to "give all diligence" to add the so-called Christian graces to our faith: virtue, knowledge, self-control, etc. But these traits of spiritual maturity are not options; they are necessary if we are to keep from stumbling and enter the heavenly kingdom. "Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pt. 1:10,11).

Growth is intentional. Many of us seem to think that growth in Christ is something that happens willy nilly, whether we've decided to do that or not. But unlike physical growth, which can occur with little or no conscious thought on our part, spiritual growth is always the result of deliberate decision. There is no such thing as unintentional progress in the life of a disciple.

In Paul's advice to Timothy, it would be hard to miss his emphasis on deliberate decision: "Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you" (1 Tim. 4:15,16).

Growth is costly. There are only twenty-four hours in the day. Whatever time it takes to do the things that result in spiritual growth, that will be that much less time available to do other things. As one of our "valuables," spiritual growth is like any other thing of value: its cost is in proportion to its value. In the long run, we will have about as much spiritual growth as we're willing to pay for — by the sacrifice of other time-consuming things. As someone has said, we can have anything in life that we want, but we can't have everything. Some choices have to be made, and the choice to grow spiritually is a choice not to do some other things.

For example, most people who have taken spiritual growth seriously have found that they have to sacrifice a certain amount of sleep in order to engage in prayer. Concerning Jesus, we are told: "Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed" (Mk. 1:35). For us, there may very likely be the same kind of decision that Jesus had to make: do I get up and pray before the day's activities begin or do I lie in bed a little longer. Spiritual growth is costly, and the alarm clock often presents us with the day's first price tag.

Sydney J. Harris said, "Our dilemma is that we hate change and love it at the same time; what we really want is for things to remain the same but get better." Living in a culture where people have been led to believe they can "have it all," we suppose that there must be a way to grow to spiritual maturity without doing anything other than what we've already been doing. But that is folly. If we keep spending our time as we always have, we won't grow any more than we have in the past. If things remain the same, they won't get better. So let's actually change. Let's sacrifice some of our activities and devote that time to growing in Christ.

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