

Does any one else ever feel like you are not as far along spiritually as you should be? I certainly feel like that at times. I mean, I think back to my raising, the church where I grew up, the teachers and preachers, my godly friends, and hours in the book and I think: shouldn't I be a lot stronger and more faithful than I am?

For those who know how I feel, let me ask, “What are we supposed to do about this?”

- 1) Should we keep reading about doing the right thing and hope a little more sticks every time?
- 2) Should we just read about God's mercy and beg for it and lean on it as the only hope?
- 3) Should we, as so many have, just give up, since we are sure we'll never be good enough?

Well, if you are someone who knows you haven't come as far as you should, and who regularly has to fact your own shortcomings and contemplate the frustration of underdevelopment... well... you are in really good company. Not because I am with you in this, but because you share shortcomings and underdevelopment in common with at least 11 men: the Apostles whom Jesus chose.

These guys were handpicked by the Savior. They were around Him for nearly 3 years, and walked with Him every waking moment for about a year and a half. And yet, if there was one term I could use to describe them accurately across the board, it might be: FLAWED. They were trying, at least 11 of the 12 were, but woefully insufficient for the task at hand. They were immature at times, underdeveloped, and probably nowhere near where they ought to have been in terms of spirituality.

Let me provide examples to show that these men were certainly not spiritual specimens of excellence:

- I. Often times they lacked Spiritual Understanding**
 - a. **John 13:3-10** – They didn't understand what Jesus was doing.
 - b. **John 13:26-29** – They lacked understanding of what was going on around them.
 - c. So, if you ever feel like you struggle with understanding Jesus' will for your life, or you struggle with distinguishing good and evil around you, you are not alone.
 - d. Looking back, the apostles seem foolish for both oversights, but they lacked maturity.
- II. Often times they struggled with Pride over Humility**
 - a. How many of the 18 months with Jesus did they argue about who was the greatest?
 - i. **Mark 9:33-34** – They traveled along discussing this with Jesus right next to them!
 - ii. **Matthew 20:20-24** – James and John's mother even asked on their behalf.
 - b. Is it ever all about you and that is getting in the way of the true purpose of Love God and Love Your Neighbor. Well, it isn't the right attitude, but it is a COMMON one, the apostles struggled with it all along the way.
- III. Occasionally it just came down to a Lack of Faith**
 - a. Not sure how it is going to make you feel to hear this, but even those who walked and talked with Jesus sometimes came up short on the simple element of Faith.
 - i. **Matthew 14:28-31** – Peter lost focus while walking on the water.
 - ii. **Matthew 16:5-8** – They let carnal worries keep them from the spiritual point.
 - iii. **Mark 16:14** – After the resurrection they are rebuked for their lack of faith.
 - b. There is no justification for a lack of trust in Jesus, but it is not something unique to you or me. Even the Apostles were shaken and unsure during times of trial and distress.
- IV. Obviously they wavered in Commitment to Jesus**
 - a. Not during times of triumph or acceptance, but when things got hard, they faltered.
 - i. **Mark 16:45-50** – They were not prepared to stand and they fled.
 - ii. **Mark 14:71-72** – Even Peter denied Jesus three times in the hour of trial.
 - b. I get disappointed in myself when I let difficult circumstances change the way my faith works, but though they had been repeatedly warned by Jesus, the apostles did exactly that.
- V. On their own, they came up short on Strength**
 - a. **Matthew 17:14-20** – They didn't have what it took to accomplish this work.
 - b. **Mark 16:10-11** – Dejected, weak, defeated even, they couldn't even believe good news.
 - c. Ever feel like you weren't strong enough in Christ to do what was right? Or that things were just too hard to see it working out? Yeah, these 11 men know how you feel.

So what should they have done: should they have just accepted their inadequacy and hoped it would all somehow work out in the end? Should they have just given up?

And what about Jesus? Would He just give up on them and replace them with 12 men from the nearest synagogue. Well, maybe He would have, except for ONE QUALITY all of these men possessed:

Luke 17:1-6 – They wanted and requested and sought to BE BETTER! They beckoned for the Lord to increase their faith, make them understand, help them grow. And He assures them that it can happen! This attitude of never giving up but pressing on to being stronger is the reason Jesus bore with them.

In fact, this attitude triggered Jesus' Patience! They were willing to learn, willing to listen. And in that vein, though they were deeply flawed, Jesus was willing to help them:

He kept teaching and demonstrating and proving the Truths that would make them strong:

- I. **John 13:12-17** – They stayed at the table and He kept teaching them.
 - a. Patiently Teaches
- II. **Mark 9:34-37; Matthew 20:24-28** – He demonstrated humility in the kingdom.
 - a. Lovingly Demonstrates
- III. **Matthew 14:30-33; Matthew 16:8-10** – He showed them His limitless power.
 - a. Powerfully Proves
- IV. **Luke 24:36-41, 50-53** – He founded and firmed their resolve with His victory over death.
 - a. Miraculously Triumphs
- V. **Acts 2:1-4, 24, 38, 43** – He gave them the power to say and do what was needed!
 - a. Fully Provides

The road was slow, but steady. There were setbacks but none gave up. *They begged for Jesus to help them be better, and they listened while He taught them.* And low and behold, a seemingly hopeless collection of uneducated, oft confused fishermen and tax collectors became **warriors for the faith**.

Acts 5:27-32 – I wonder if Jesus, sitting at the right hand of the Father, remembering those 3 difficult years, observed this scene where the apostles make their stand in Jerusalem, simply smiles.

So, back to you and me. Okay, I'll play it safe and just talk about myself. I am not always where I want to be and can be disappointed by my lack of spiritual progress. I can give examples to identify my connection with each and every flaw the apostles demonstrated.

But I will ask it today. I will ask it tomorrow. I will proclaim it as a mission statement of life:

"Jesus, Increase My Faith!" I will never give up. I will never accept failure. I will ask for His help.

And, when that attitude and will and drive is present, He will provide:

- 1) He will patiently keep teaching, if we will patiently keep reading and learning.
- 2) Lovingly demonstrate what the kingdom is all about, if we will observe.
- 3) Testify to His glory through miracles, if we will accept the evidence He provides.
- 4) Forever render the tomb empty and let His resurrection become a source of daily power.
- 5) And though not miraculously, He will fully provide from the Spirit all the power we need!

And then, one day, out of nowhere, while you are facing some trial, some tribulation, or temptation or confrontation, where you have failed to live up to your faith before, you will... **nailed it!** You will do exactly as God has directed and desired for you to do: amazed and grateful for your progress.

And somewhere, not too far away, a loving Savior will be watching, and He will smile.

All because you were willing to ask Him to increase your faith and humble enough to let Him.

Is there anyone here ready to ask Him for help? *He can do extraordinary things with ordinary people, if we live by faith and let Him have His way with you.*