

534 How Can I Grow Spiritually

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God's Answers to Life's Questions

From time to time all of us get low spiritually and feel the need to get our hearts and spirits charged up again with faith and love. Many Christians have a lot of zeal when they first embrace their faith, but down the road they can get sidetracked and drained of their commitment to the cause of Christ. What can we do to grow spiritually? How can we recover that desire to do the will of God as I ought to do? How can we be firm in our resolve to say no to sin? How can we put the Lord first in everything? Where can we find the help we need?

I am going to give you a little test. Can you identify these ten men? Their names are found in the Bible, in the book of Numbers: Shammua, Shaphat, Igal, Palti, Gaddiel, Gaddi, Ammiel, Sethur, Nahbi, and Geuel. Do you know who they are? I'll give some hints. Each man was a chief of one of the tribes of Israel. They were chosen leaders given an important task by God. They were sent by God to go and spy out the land of Canaan. Two others went with them, Joshua and Caleb. We remember them, but we hardly ever speak of the other men.

Moses told them in Numbers 13:18-20, "see what the land is, and whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, whether they are few or many, and whether the land that they dwell in is good or bad, and whether the cities that they dwell in are camps or strongholds, and whether the land is rich or poor, and whether there are trees in it or not. Be of good courage and bring some of the fruit of the land." So they went and spied out the land. They brought back grapes and figs and pomegranates. They said the land flows with milk and honey.

Then the ten men said, "However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there" (Num. 13:28). Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, "Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it." Then the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are." The ten men, whose names we don't remember, brought a bad report of the land to Moses. They were discouraging.

They said in Numbers 13:32-33, "The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height. And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them." We forget the names of the ten men because they lacked faith in God and had a "grasshopper complex." They had forgotten all the great things that God had done in Egypt, on the mountain, and in the wilderness. They were doubters who gave up.

Because of their doubts and fears, the whole congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. They grumbled against Moses and wished that they had died in Egypt. They even said, "Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt." Joshua and Caleb defended Moses and Aaron. The congregation, however, had gotten so worked up they said to stone them with stones. "But the glory of the Lord appeared at the tent of meeting to all the people of Israel" (Num. 14:10). God at first thought to destroy all the people for their lack of faith.

But God decided to punish only those who had seen the miracles in Egypt and in the wilderness but did not believe His promise to give them the land of Canaan. Only Joshua and Caleb of that generation twenty years old and upward would cross the Jordan and enter the promised land. The rest would perish in the wilderness in the coming 38 years.

These people saw the Ten Plagues, experienced the crossing of the Red Sea, ate the manna daily, and saw God's power at Mount Sinai; but when their faith was tested, they had not grown as they should. They were little spiritually! Joshua and Caleb, however, grew in their faith and in their commitment to God. How can we do that? The biggest difference was their faith in God and in His Word and His promises. They took God at His Word and believed what He said. Caleb said, "Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it" (Numbers 13:30). They had confidence that God would help them take the land that He had promised to them. The spiritually strong person believes every word of God and takes it seriously, even when they don't know how God will keep His promises.

That kind of trust and faith grows out of a relationship with the Lord. We trust because we love and know the Lord. Do you have a close, loving relationship with the Lord? Does it show in how you react to His commandments. The ten spies discouraged the people, because they did not believe God would help them to do His will. Trust and love means that we take God seriously enough to do whatever He asks, even if it is risky and seems most difficult. The Anakim were giants, but they were not bigger than God. Neither are the challenges to your faith. With God, all things are indeed possible!

You can find that loving trust, faith, by a close study of God's word. Paul said, "faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17). The word of God can help us through tough times. Paul said in Romans 15:4, "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." In the Bible we find others overcoming their struggles through God's help. That encourages us and gives us hope in our own struggles.

David said in Psalm 119:9-11, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you." The word of God is a treasure that reminds us of our relationship to God and keeps us pure in heart and mind and soul. When a Christian, day by day, looks deep into the Word of God, he will grow strong in faith, in morals, in character, in purity, and in heart.

Where is your Bible? Is it on the shelf? Is it in your car? How long has it been since you spent an hour (or 30 minutes for all that) with your Bible, listening to God? My friend, the only way the Word of God can do you good, is for it to be in your heart. You have to treasure it up in your heart, cherish it, love it, meditate on it, and live it out in your life. Medicine won't help you if you don't take it; and the word of God can't make a difference in your life if you are unwilling to digest it and live it in your life. Recently a best selling fiction book sold 250,000 copies per hour. Children sat up all night reading it.

Have you ever sat up all night reading the word of God? When we were doing mission work in Belarus, we gave away New Testaments to people who had never owned one. I was amazed that many of our students would read the entire New Testament within hours. I never will forget a sweet, older lady, a retired principal of a public school in communist Belarus. When we gave out New Testaments that day, she took my hand and kissed, thanking me over and over with tears in her eyes. She had seen her parents with a Bible but had never owned one herself. She treasured God's Word.

Books can tell you many, many things; but only the Word of God, the Bible, has the Words of Life that can bring you eternal life with God. Only the Word of God in the Bible can help you understand the God who created this world and sustains it by His power. You will never be able to know and grow close to God until you get into your Bible. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:21, "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe." God has revealed himself in His Word. Let's take time to know Him!

Paul said in Philippians 3:7-11, "But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead."

More than anything else, Paul wanted to know God. He made knowing Christ and gaining the life He gives his number one priority. What would you give up for Christ? Would you give up your heritage? Paul did. Would you give up your career? Paul did. Would you give the rest of your life to tell the story of Jesus? Paul did. The more you read and study the word of God, the more you will see that it is true and that God is speaking through it. The Bible has stood the test of time and has proven itself again and again. It is your source of spiritual strength, because it is how God is speaking to us today.

It only takes 13 hours to read the New Testament through aloud. One could do it in a single day. But if you read it once, you'll want to read it again and again. It is so rich and wonderful, you'll never tire of it. Each time you read it, you'll see a new treasure, a new promise, a new exhortation, or a new command to help you live your life abundantly. Take some time each day to make the Bible a priority. It will certainly help your spirit more than some of the trashy TV that's on these days. It will give you hope, joy, optimism and promise for the days ahead. Each day give yourself to God!

And as you study, pray. Pray for guidance and wisdom. Pray for help to understand God's word. David prayed in song in Psalm 119:18, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law." If the Law could give us wondrous things, how much more so the gospel! God speaks to us through the Bible, and He gives us the privilege of speaking to Him through prayer. God is interested

in us and wants us to pray to Him. Our prayers matter when our hearts are right with Him and we have been willing to obey His Word. God hears us when we hear Him.

Have you taken the time to study God's Word and obey it? To become a Christian, you must first hear that word, believe it, and obey it. The gospel is God's power to save (Rom. 1:16). When you believe the gospel, it will lead you to repent of all your sins, to confess Jesus as the Son of God, and to be baptized in water for the forgiveness of your sins. If you haven't done that yet, we pray that you will today.

When Pierce Harris, a preacher in Atlanta, Georgia, spoke at a prison work camp, the prisoner introducing him recalled earlier days when he associated with the minister. "Several years ago," he said, "two boys lived in the same community in North Georgia and attended the same school, played with the same bunch of fellows, and went to the same Bible school. One of them dropped out of the Bible school because he felt that he had outgrown it, and that it was 'sissy stuff.' The other boy kept on going because he felt that it really did mean something in his life.

The prisoner then said, "The boy who dropped out is making this introduction today. The boy who kept going to Bible school is the well-known preacher who will preach to us this morning." The more we get away from the Bible, the more we see our morals decline and our lives decay. More than ever what we need is God's Word to feed us spiritually, to help us grow and become the people God intended. Let's be like Joshua and Caleb. Let's believe God is surely able to help us. The way to grow on the inside is to nourish ourselves with the life that comes only from God's Holy Word.

If you are not going to church anywhere, why not visit one of the churches of Christ near you. They would love to have a visit from you and to study the Bible with you. If you have a Bible on the shelf that you haven't read in a while, why not begin reading it. If you haven't prayed much lately, why not take some time to talk to the Lord. Ask him to help you find the truth. Don't get sidetracked by the pop psychology religions or the Christian entertainment industry, go to the Bible to find the truth.

We're not here to get your money. We're here to help you get to heaven. All the expenses are paid by your friends at Concord Road Church of Christ in Brentwood, Tennessee. If you are in our area, we'd love to meet you. Worship with us some Sunday at 9 am or 6 pm. You are always welcome and wanted. If you cannot visit us, there is a wonderful congregation of the churches of Christ near you. We'd love to hear from you. Until next week, we remind you to look to God for all your answers. God bless you and we love you from Concord Road.

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