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The Importance of Spiritual Growth

Walking down the boardwalk of Daytona Beach, Florida while hundreds of people passed by was an exhilarating experience for me. It was a party time with many young people drinking and celebrating. I was the same age of many of them except I wasn't there to party, I was there to witness of Christ! It wasn't my first-time street ministering or sharing the gospel and offering prayer for the sick; in fact, I had been doing that since I was a teenager. But this was different; I was carrying a large sign that was on a tall pole that reached above the crowd and could be seen by everyone. It said, "JESUS LOVES YOU" and I was wondering the reaction I would get as I walked through the crowd.

On this trip, I planned for our group to travel down for the week to share the gospel. At the end of the day it was so satisfying to share the stories of the many testimonies of people healed and saved. We would each share our experiences and praise God for lives touched and then make our plans to do the same the next day. For a long time, I felt that to be used of God like this was the best feeling in the world.

Just knowing that God is willing to work through us can bring an excitement and fulfillment of purpose. It was so satisfying that I became a seeker of these types of spiritual achievements for many years. Up till that point, I had been taught that the fulfillment of the gospel was to minister to the lost. I was taught that the only thing we can bring to heaven was other people, so I should focus my life on reaching as many as possible.

With this philosophy in my heart, I traveled to orphanages on different continents to hold broken children. I traveled to motorcycle rallies to pass out tracts of salvation. I raised funds and built churches in foreign countries. I created drama teams and took them on the street to gather crowds and then share Jesus. I've fed the poor, faithfully preached, prayed for and shared the Gospel of love. I also began to find my esteem from all that I was doing and was finding myself as a value to God.

Like most Christians, I've been blessed to see God work in many ways and am so thankful for all that has happened in serving God. And yet something in me wanted more. I felt the Lord draw me into a closer relationship with Him versus just looking at my achievements that I could produce in His name. My life with Him includes spiritual achievements from Him but must also include a lifestyle of spiritual growth! Verses began to stand out to me like 1 Peter 2:1-3 *"Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious."*

It can be easy to focus on being busy and purposeful for God because we are grateful to be part of the kingdom of God, and yet if we don't also focus on spiritual growth, we can end up limiting our ability to fulfill God's specific plan for our lives. We can see by Jesus' example how over and over He would retreat from ministry to be alone in prayer. It tells us of God doing incredible miracles through the apostles as the church grew in great numbers of people being saved and touched.

It says in Acts 5:14-16 *"And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them. Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed."* Many big-hearted believers would stay in this place of purpose and continue in ministering miracles and power. They might say "Look at how God is using me, therefore, I must be busy reaching the lost." However, that is not what the Apostles did; they followed the example of Jesus.

Let's read from Acts 6:2-4 *"Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. "Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; "but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."* In the midst of multitudes of lives being changed, they saw the importance of pulling back from their spiritual achievements to focus on spiritual growth!

One time I saw a vision of a large group of about 500 young children running around and playing together in a church sanctuary, they appeared to be between four and five years of age. As you can imagine there was fun and laughter for a long time and there were some small squabbles over toys as these young boys and girls were unsupervised. Then suddenly a laptop computer showed up in the middle of the stage. A strong voice boomed into the room asking for an email to be sent out from the computer, so all the children ran to the computer at the same time. Some began to push buttons while at the same time others were pulling at the screen trying to make it work. Fighting began to break out between them, and even buttons were being broken off the keyboard as they all attempted to do a simple task, but they just didn't know how to do it.

Then in this vision, everyone stopped as a grown man walked into the room. He walked slowly and peacefully through the large crowd of children and went right up to the laptop. He knelt down, looked at the screen, pushed one button, and the email was sent. This is when God spoke to me and said: "What I want to do on this earth with you will require spiritual maturity more than your spiritual activity. Always remember that spiritual achievements are not the same as spiritual growth.

I've always believed that God could do more in one moment than I could do for Him in a lifetime of effort. Unfortunately, too many believers have lost the value on the

need to spend time in prayer and in the word. It's in these times that we might even feel as if we are missing out on activities of good works for God. I still believe that the most important part of heaven is who I can take with me, but I've also decided to focus on the importance of my spiritual growth. I want to encourage you to be about your Father's business and also to continue to grow in Him each day by spending time in His word and prayer. God has incredible things for you.

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