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Choice Empowerment

(Ways of deception & learning)

Welcome to Inward Authority's Choice Empowerment! Thank you for taking the time to explore this process of spiritual development. I hope this material can help you as it has helped others and myself. It would be best to repeat this workbook over time to keep our awareness sharp and empowered.

Our mental attitude affects everything we do and how well we do it. Reliance upon God is the goal. Doubt creeps in. If we believe something will not work that belief can make it true. Disbelief can affect how hard we try and sabotage the results.

This workbook can help us learn ways where our thinking can mislead us. Most of us can agree no one is perfect, but how many of us are ready to discuss our imperfections and find solutions for improvement? For the sake of making corrections, we ought to learn from and support each other. Support groups can be a powerful tool provided we have enough humility to give ourselves entirely to the process.

Together we can identify our errors, share about them, read biblical corrective action, listen to others who are going through the process, and then put into practice new corrective action. Healing can begin with purifying our hearts and cleansing our conscience. This ought to become a continued practice until we are perfect, otherwise we may settle for imperfection and become complacent. Yet we must choose to give ourselves to God for Godly good to have its work done within us.

There are countless stories of people who find God and become an amazing person only to fall into some self-destructive ways later on. At one point they served God with everything and at another point they became self-serving

and ungodly focused. Why do we do things we know are wrong and then keep doing them over and over again? This workbook will go deep into information that can help us to answer that question.

The more we search this material for objective understanding the better we will become at recognizing our own thinking errors. Our own humility and effort will determine how well we understand our self-deception. Pride, our own understanding, vanity, resentment, dishonest, and fear can easily close our minds from seeing truth and refuse new understanding.

As with all learning, repetition is essential. Revisiting this material can be very helpful to keep us consciously aware of our blind spots. God is Spirit. If we can't see God it most likely has to do with our current mindset and beliefs. Let's ensure we love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength to stay spiritual.

Learning

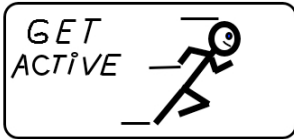
Learning to be different

Watch the video called "The Backwards Brain Bicycle"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MFzDaBzBIL0>

1. He believed he could do it and experience taught him otherwise.
2. Experience revealed a truth, knowledge vs. understanding
3. He experiences masses of other people who think they can ride it and are just as surprised as he was when experience proves them wrong.
4. Sometimes we cannot change our way of thinking and doing things (immediately that is) "even if we want to"
5. Relearning takes dedication. He practiced 5 minutes everyday. He had many wrecks. It took him 8 months.
6. Listen to the description of the two systems within his brain. He either goes by one system or the other. They do not work together.
7. Once he adopted a new habit with his new way of riding he had difficulty doing what he used to do, the old way of riding.
8. Instead of freeing his brain from a cognitive bias he could only redesignate cognitive bias
9. "Brain clicked back into the old algorithm

10. “Be very careful how you interpret things because you’re looking at the world with a bias”



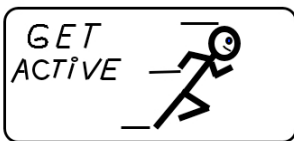
How has experience proven beliefs wrong in your life? What does he mean by we cannot change our way of thinking even if we want to? Are we aware of our cognitive bias? What’s your bias? Are we willing to apply ourselves daily to grow in God’s character even if it takes 8 months? Read Romans 8 & discuss.

Choices

See “Kronk’s Shoulder Angel and Devil” Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RseLZ9LqQv0>

We each will experience two ways of doing things. There is God’s way and then there is the other way. What we choose to follow brings with it consequences within our hearts, minds, relationships, and souls. The affects can be extreme or subtle.



What are some examples of where we have chosen God’s way and the consequences that came from such choices? Was there a difference? What are ways we can convince ourselves to do what is right with God? How can we think more about God and what God wants?

Brief intro to learning

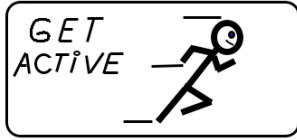
Passive vs. Active Learning

Passive Learning: “students receive information from the instructor and internalize it, "where the learner receives no feedback from the instructor” (lecture or sermon)”

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Passive_learning

Spiritual learning can often come through attending, listening, and reading. These methods fall into the description of Passive Learning.

For correct spiritual growth, we will need to rely increasingly more upon God and understand more clearly who God is and how to do God's will. This will take some individual study, practice, self-examination and correction.



How do we feel about taking the initiative to learn more on our own? How did those in the Bible learn? Do we want what those in the Bible had? Are we willing to do what they did to get it?

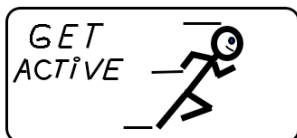
Once we begin putting into practice instructions the experience becomes far more challenging and engaging. We can learn a lot about ourselves with more action. We can learn more where we really are in our faith. Acting upon instructions can teach us far more than inaction.

Active Learning:

- “students are actively or experientially involved in the learning process,”
- “to learn, students must do more than just listen: They must read, write, discuss, or be engaged in solving problems.”
- “students must engage in such higher-order thinking tasks as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.^[3] Active learning engages students in two aspects – doing things and thinking about the things they are doing.”

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Active_learning

In our spiritual development there is little doubt how being more active in our learning is better than passive learning. To know Godly is to do God's will and then reflect deeply upon the experiences. Then we do it again and again to grow further from each experience. We ought to be active each day.



Does anyone have an example of where they read Bible instructions, put into practice, and learned through the experience. If so, please share what that was like before, during, and after. When we do book studies, do we practice what we read before we move on to the next book?

Webb's Depth of Knowledge

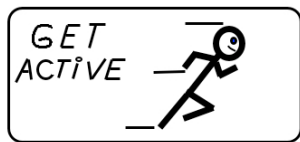
Many education systems refer to and form lesson plans using Webb's "Depth of Knowledge." Basically, there are 4 levels:

1. Recall & Reproduction
2. Working with Skills & Concepts
3. Short-term Strategic Thinking
4. Extended Strategic Thinking

http://www.aps.edu/sapr/documents/resources/Webbs_DOK_Guide.pdf

In our spiritual walk we can examine our selves to see how deep we are learning God's will, ways, purpose, etc. On the webpage provided above there are written examples to clarify each level under potential activities:

1. Recite a fact related to... (Book studies and sermons)
2. Construct a model to demonstrate how it looks or works
3. Use a Venn Diagram that shows how two topics are the same and different
4. Tasks that require a number of cognitive and physical skills in order to complete



How deep have we experienced our spiritual understanding using this model? Have we used a Venn Diagram to illustrate our will from God's will? Are we performing tasks that require cognitive and physical skills to improve our spiritual development?

Understanding facts or talking about information is at the first level. There are many first level Christians. It's one thing to have an experience with God, another to explain it to others where it makes sense, and still another to explain it to others where it makes sense and how it relates to the Bible. Explaining how the facts work can bring us to level two. In the Bible when Jesus gives instruction on how to do things in Matthew 6, if we are to understand that information at a deeper level then we must practice those instructions over time while evaluating the experience.

In recovery groups working the steps is highly emphasized. Those who work the steps and complete them will learn far more than those who merely read them. Reading is a level one depth of knowledge. Experience moves from one to three. Experience is far more advanced with knowledge than reading, listening, or observing.

Bad company corrupts good character

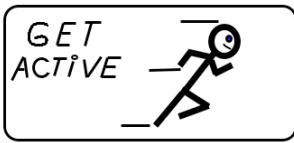
I smoked cigarettes from the time I was 14 until I was 26. I never believed it was good for me, but I did it anyway. So why do it? The other kids I hung out with did it and they encouraged me to do it. I wanted to fit in and have friends. (Would I have started smoking if no one else did it?) We encouraged each other to do a bunch of dumb things like that.

Over time the behavior became part of my identity. I believed I needed to do it and did not understand how to not do it. It felt wrong not to do it. I was trained into it. Retraining was required.

Reading about how to stop did not prepare me for the mind game involved while in abstinence. The mind is funny like that. One day I was completely motivated and quit without a problem, but the next day that motivation had disappeared and I returned to it. Understanding the tricks of the mind can empower us to recognize temptation and deception. Remember, God gave us brains, let us better understand what goes on within them and use them wisely.

When I began reducing my participation with passive aggressive behavior, sarcasms, and condescending speech I found myself facing similar challenges I faced when I quit smoking. I realized associating with others who frequently practiced passive aggressive and sarcastic behavior was negatively affecting my spiritual development. I needed to make better decisions regarding my relationships to help improve my spiritual development.

Questions? Confusion? These are part of the journey and ought to motivate us to find answers. Yet sometimes the struggle or discomfort of being confused can convince us to avoid trying to understand. Please stay the course. Struggle is part of transformation.



How does the people we associate with affect our behavior? How do we choose relationships? Do we seek out relationships with others that will help us grow spiritually? Do our friends challenge us to grow in love, peace, truth, mercy, forgiveness, patience, generosity, and justice.

Limited power in choice

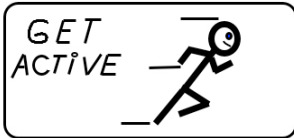
We cannot choose something we do not know. When all my friends smoke, places I attend involve smoking, and I like to smoke, why should I quit? Everything I knew involved smoking. I avoided nonsmoking people and places. It did not make sense to my beliefs, habits, and interests to quit. So I rejected quitting as an option without much thought. It seemed to be the right choice with my understanding (life of smoking).

I had to be convinced with new information. This may be the reason 12 step programs highlight the necessity of people hitting their bottom (low point - high conflict). Continuing my smoking needed to become difficult enough to convince me to quit. When I finally quite smoking my mother had been receiving breathing treatments for emphysema, I was around more nonsmokers and ex-smokers, costs had doubled, and new laws were in place setting restrictions on smoking. Reasons to quit were growing.

In order to choose to quit I needed to believe I could quit. Was this an option within my beliefs. If my mind never considered quitting then it would not exist as an option. I needed to spend some time thinking about quitting to better develop an understanding of how that plays out in my life. Some trial and error helped me learn such things. For me, relapses were just breaks in the learning how to quit experiences. Failure teaches me I still need to learn.

Learning how we are doing things wrong can feel uncomfortable. Learning how we can be better subsequently informs us that we are currently wrong. Imagine someone saying, "here is how you can do better." Many people upon hearing such a statement might shift into a defensive posture. Many of us might not want (willing to take action to make it happen) to be spiritually better due to the condition of our beliefs. Most of us have the ability to eat more healthy, exercise, cut our debt, be more honest, meditate, love, etc. Yet all these require choices and commitments toward new action. Few people will honestly choose to do it and follow through. Some people avoid going to

doctors, therapists, and dentists to avoid hearing how they ought to change. Many of us simply avoid seeking improvement due to the perceived discomfort. We limit our choices to grow by avoiding others who would encourage us to grow.



Have there been times when we have avoided others who would encourage us to improve? Have we chosen to spend time with others who were not good for us? What might be the reasoning behind doing wrong when we know it will create problems?

It is necessary to continue to look at our wrongs and increase our awareness of them so that we may seek solutions. Yet we ought to avoid attacking ourselves for being in error. Self-condemning behavior does not support spiritual growth. We see the wrongs within us to understand how to make corrections. We are not bad or evil people because we error. Everyone errors. We are just choosing to move out of that error.

Nobody is perfect, but are we seeking improvement? We must shift our focus toward solutions and keep our thoughts in that direction. We then look at the next step toward the solution and act. The only way to get to solutions is to take action toward them.

Our minds become trained to act in ways they are trained to act. When we attempt to move out of our old training (habits & learnings) our minds can resist. Our minds will often want to stay the course it understands for comfort, convenience, and familiarity. Staying with what we know is easier and less of a struggle. As we give into change we may feel out of place and our minds may suggest what we are doing is wrong. It can feel wrong simply because it is different. We must persist toward change to let it grow on us. Our old ways of thinking can be bad company trying to corrupt a new way of thinking and living. Old messages can play in our heads from bad company.

Support groups, new friends, prayers, thoughts, and habits encouraging us toward our new goal is often needed. Our minds need encouragement and convincing to stay the course. We need supportive messages. Our thoughts will need to supply us with motivation toward our desired new behavior. Every day we ought to practice new thinking guiding us toward spiritual solutions. We ought to see the good in what we are doing.

Let's agree to seek truth through humility and objectivity at the expense of our personal comfort. Relying upon personal comforts can set us up to refuse uncomfortable change. Fear of accepting responsibility and accountability often exists. If we are not testing ourselves toward improved spiritual growth we can fall short.

Own Understanding - Belief

Preconception

[Preconception](#) (click this link and read pages 10-14)

“Mind-sets tend to be quick to form but resistant to change.”

<https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/psychology-of-intelligence-analysis/PsychofIntelNew.pdf>

When we develop an understanding or belief it will take more evidence to change that belief to learn something contrary to that belief than if we had no belief. The mind defends its current understanding against opposing information. We become surprised when we learn we are wrong in our beliefs. We might feel foolish, embarrassed, or ashamed. Some people can become irrationally defensive refusing to admit they are wrong even when the evidence is piled up and they refuse to examine the evidence. This attitude of refusing to look at the evidence can be spiritually dangerous.

It is important to be convinced and aware that our current beliefs are not perfect and if we want to improve our beliefs, then corrections are required. Our misguided beliefs guide us into spiritual error so we ought to seek correction to reduce such errors. If we are not seeking corrections then we have decided not to change. Deciding to avoid decision is also a choice of avoidance. Remember, “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over expecting different results” Author unknown.

We ought to remind ourselves of this daily. If we let it slip to the back of our minds it can be forgotten. We ought to remember and keep aware that we can be defending beliefs that are incorrect, unhealthy, harmful, and spiritually

destructive. Each one of us has this defensive posture to information that says we are wrong. If we can humble ourselves to accept our wrongs we can seek improvement.

“Richard K. Betts worked toward developing a theory of intelligence failure in his article “Analysis, War, and Decision: Why Intelligence Failures are Inevitable”

“Betts identifies pathologies in communication as his second cause of failure, which he also considers most common.”

“The third and final cause of intelligence failure according to Betts is the paradox of perception. Betts regards this source of failure as the most crucial, and most difficult to address. The paradox of perception is that preconceived notions held by either analysts or policy makers impede them from accurately assessing a situation.”

<https://www.e-ir.info/2012/11/08/are-intelligence-failures-inevitable/>

We are biased

We all have inward biased filters. We are often quick to protect our bias and deny things that challenge it. We ought to evaluate what goes on in our thinking that may self sabotage spiritual growth and obedience to a better way of living.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wEwGBIr_RIw

Cognitive Bias (also see [naive physics](#)) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naive_physics

“A cognitive bias is a systematic pattern of deviation from [norm](#) or rationality in judgment.^[1] Individuals create their own "subjective [social reality](#)" from their perception of the input. An individual's construction of social reality, not the [objective](#) input, may dictate their behavior in the social world.”

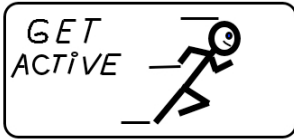
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cognitive_bias

Cognitive Bias - simple definition:

1. We form information to make it agree with who we think we are.

2. We react inwardly with information that is uncomfortable to make it more comfortable.

Main point: We distort information to make it easier and more comfortable.

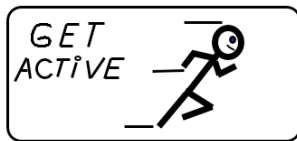


When information goes against what we believe, how do we respond? Are we being objective? Do we evaluate how we might be wrong? Are we quick to see how we are right?

Open-mindedness and humility is essential.
Contempt reactions ought to be avoided.

Let's see the truth in following biases and how we might relate to them. Carefully read the following list of biases and try to find three you may have personally experienced.

Examples https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_cognitive_biases



When each person in the group is ready, share your findings with each other. Can anyone share how your own bias may be interfering with learning and making healthy choices?

Everyone experiences misinterpretations and misattributions of information. We ought to evaluate ourselves for error frequently, because we all error frequently. Awareness of thinking errors can help us make corrections. As we recognize a self-deceiving thought, we can then replace that thought with a more truthful statement that can help guide us into correction. [see thought replacement](https://psychcentral.com/lib/replacing-your-negative-thoughts/) <https://psychcentral.com/lib/replacing-your-negative-thoughts/>

Example: we may think to ourselves “I can’t...” and we can replace it with “maybe I can...” or “how can I learn to...”

Thoughts that lead to blaming, shaming, victimizing, resentment, fear, worry, anxiety, hurry, impatience, intolerance, injustice, dishonesty, and selfish ambition can fuel spiritual destruction. To grow spiritually good, we must correct such thinking toward peace, love, mercy, forgiveness, patience, truth,

justice, patience, and generosity. Avoiding correction in such thinking could be to condone its destructive power.

Prideful and arrogant thinking can also interfere. There is a quote by Herbert Spencer used in the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* page 568 that reads, “There is a principle which is a bar against all information, which is proof against all arguments and which cannot fail to keep a man in everlasting ignorance— That principle is contempt prior to investigation.”

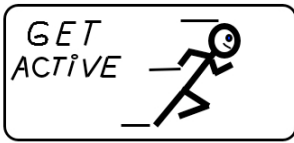
And how many of us really investigate our ideas, thoughts, and beliefs to see the error in them? Do we see our wrongs and make daily corrections. Are we struggling to improve each day by correcting our error? The 10th step is to do such evaluations with our selfishness, resentment, fear, and dishonesty. Are we helpful? How helpful are we? What exactly are we doing? How much effort are we applying?

One way of keeping ourselves from growing is to dismiss opportunities as impossible, unbelievable, inconvenient, invalid, irrelevant, uninteresting etc. Improving our knowledge, health, and spirit will involve effort, time, adjustment, loss, struggle, planning, and discomfort. We can grow with God using understanding that is God’s. We require new spiritual experiences to teach us new Godly understanding to help us grow and improve.

Partiality & favoritism

We each have preferences that affect our choices and behavior. What we wear, how we speak, where we sit, music we listen to, movies we see, what we read, etc. How insistent are we about our preferences, to get what we want, and have control over our ambiance? Are we willing to let go of such things and let God shape our ambiance through our development of God’s character traits?

Making choices that agree with our preferences/inward training may be operating from a fixed mindset/closed mindedness. To grow with God requires a growth mindset/open mind. Are we willing to do things differently that is beyond our understanding and experience? Are we willing to align ourselves more toward God’s preferences that can move us into new and different experiences?



Our preferences or wants can be in conflict with God's will. In what ways have our wants or preferences stunted growth with God? What is the meaning of 'let go, let God?' Are we willing to let go? How does our level of willingness affect this process? Are we willing to go to any length to grow with God?

Our wants, desires, and rights/entitlements (what we believe we deserve) can influence our choices and behavior. When we believe we are entitled to something and not getting "our way" we may become intolerant, angry, defensive, or impatient. Our preferences, what we learned to desire, often influence our choices. We can learn to desire new and different things if we allow ourselves to acquire it (acquired taste) through experience. We tend to prefer people and situations we know and understand. The more we get to know and understand, through experience God's goodness, the more we can increase our preference for it.

When we choose, most of us may have the underlying question "why should we" or "what good will it do?" The problem with trying to rationalize or convince ourselves to take an action outside of our understanding is that our understanding is trained to convince us not to do it. Our understanding will not desire it unless it knows the rewards for doing it. We can't and won't know the rewards until we do it.

Spiritual life and the kingdom of God is invisible and intangible. The only true way of understanding the costs and benefits is to give ourselves over to the process to gain insight and understanding of what happens within us and about us in spiritual ways over time because the evidence doesn't rarely grows in a day.

There are some information gathering skills we can learn to help us explore evidence about God's goodness, righteousness, and grace.

- Objectivity and guarding against cognitive bias and preferences
- Introspection to evaluate our thought activity, and awareness of our feelings (love, fear, anger, peace, etc.)
- Correcting our perceptions for truth and accuracy
- Self discipline to stay the course, repeat practices, keep evaluating
- Empathy - sense how others feel, (compassion, and love) and to connect with others emotionally, mentally, and spiritually

We will need to gain a spiritual sense, discernment, and education. We ought to become a spiritual explorer set out to see how our application of God's ways affects us and the world around us.

Learned Helplessness

"I can't!" ~ this phrase can set many of us up to fail and ought to be eliminated from our thoughts and words. It's not just a phrase. The thought can prompt us into an attitude of resistance. If we think or say, "I can't" we ought to pause and really evaluate the truth in it. Is it a true statement of fact? Are we really incapable? If we think truthfully about it we may discover 'we can.'

A way restate it may be, "I don't know how, but maybe I can learn." By choosing to accept a different wording with our thought prompt we may notice a more open feeling, attitude, responsibility, and empowerment. We may even feel resistance toward this simple step of changing how we think/speak. Remember willingness to go to any length? Watch the clip from the link below to see how easy and quickly we can learn to limit ourselves.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=gFmFOmprTt0>

After trying and failing repeatedly we can come to believe we are incapable of being successful. The common phrase used by victims of "Learned Helplessness" is, "I can't." Eating healthy, getting better grades, quitting an addictive behavior, doing healthy moderate exercise, decreasing stress, reducing fear or anger, and many other positive changes in fact can be accomplished by just about anyone who is willing to take the appropriate action. Perception can be reality. If we think or perceive we can't do something we will often prove ourselves correct.

"You had to have been there." "You have to see it to believe it." Seeing is believing. First hand experience teaches us far more than any other method.

Psalm 34:8 Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!

Let's imagine ourselves being near a pool that we believe is very cold. We see our friends in it splashing around appearing to be having fun, but we believe they are not being entirely honest. We believe the water is too cold. (remember preconditioning) We cannot convince ourselves it will be comfortable to get in the water while we maintain our belief that the water is

too cold. Our friends cannot convince us either as long as we are unwilling to try. Only by getting in and feeling the water will we be able to know the truth. Is it cold or isn't it? Can we grow spiritually or can't we? Experience is essential. We must put it to the test and see the truth.

Learned Helplessness is a belief and a behavior. To some extremes an individual can develop what is called the hopeless and helpless variety. This type will believe they can't change and will deny and refuse any argument suggesting otherwise immediately and seemingly impulsively. They have closed their minds to contrary information and are completely unwilling. They seek help, but the hopeless focus seeks to sabotage that help.

Hopeless/helpless video <https://peperperspective.com/2018/07/23/be-careful-what-you-think/> (Scroll down to video)

Overcoming Obstacles Message - Hope
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6P2nPI6CTlc>

The retraining of our minds begins with looking at where we can change and the good we can do. As we focus on the good we can do we become empowered to act upon it. We can choose to be around others who can give us hope. We can choose to remind ourselves to seek good, correct wrongs, and improve our thoughts. We can grow with God if we take the path to grow with God. Each day we ought to seek God's ways.

Phobias - debilitating choice

Ever examine a list of phobias? There are 530 phobias listed on the following site: http://phobialist.com/phobia_faqs.html

Ablutophobia: fear of cleaning self
Philophobia: fear of falling in love
Nomophobia: fear of not having cell service
Ambulophobia: fear of walking
Selenophobia: fear of the moon

The point is that we have fear and much of it is irrational. Yet it exists. The first step to correct problems is to accept there are problems, but the second and equally important step is to admit there are solutions. Once we

understand the problem and see the solution then we can take action toward correction. It's often far more difficult to convince ourselves to take the action than it is to actually do it. We can become stuck when we deny ourselves from taking corrective action. Choice has always been sticking point.

Many of us fear discomfort and struggle. Believing we are helpless can remove stress from believe we are responsible. Saying "I can't" can relieve us from responsibility and keep us from doing something that can be uncomfortable. "I don't know how" or "I don't understand" are other ways to keep us from taking uncomfortable action (see [Eat less, move more video](#)). I don't know how to change is often a cover up for I don't want to know because it seems difficult or uncomfortable. For example, the instructions for recovery are easy to follow; go to a meeting, get a sponsor, and do what the sponsor says. The problem and struggle exists within our own unwillingness to obey the instructions. We choose not to take corrective action because at first glance it seems much easier and makes us feel better in the moment.

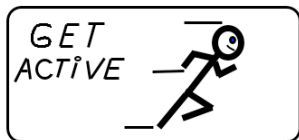
Many of us learn how to ride a bike. convince themselves to get on it. Some people can learn all by themselves without others holding the bike or using training wheels. Others need every bit of help they can get. To know how to ride a bike requires trial and error. We must get on the bike and most of us will fall. Falling is part of the learning. There is some practice, evaluation, and adjusting to be done. Our spiritual development is like that. We ought to practice God's character traits through trial and error and seek improvement with them.

Confusion and mistakes are part of the journey. Doing things unfamiliar and different often requires a system of trial and error to learn. Hurt feelings, conflict, and frustration can happen. Many of us fear failure, mistakes, and/or being seen as weak or dumb. Other's may feel awkward by our changes and there could be some social uneasiness. In such situations its more comfortable not to try than to try and fail. During this process it's important to introspectively evaluate our thoughts and increase our awareness of our thought messages toward ourselves about what we are doing. Some changes may be warranted.

Learned helplessness can sometimes involve self-hate or deep shame. A perception about self can be so negative that the mindset will not allow good things to come. Perhaps we identify ourselves as being worthless, broken, or good for nothing. A trained belief system of self-sabotage can carefully seek

out opportunities with failure to jump in and say, “I told you so” while thinking to ourselves how dumb we were to even have even tried. Realizing that such thinking is one sided and destructive is necessary. We must correct it. Correction of such resistant self-condemning and sabotaging thinking is necessary with a plan to add new believable Godly truth. This can take some time and practice before we become convinced. Many of us need some convincing due to our disbelief. In such scenarios we ought to place ourselves around others who are experiencing change to witness change. This is power in support groups. We get to see others grow and help provide evidence that says “We Can!”

“We can” break free from Learned Helplessness. First we ought to develop a plan with very simple achievable goals. As we achieve a goal we set another one and can slowly grow. Eating healthier, for example, can begin with eating one more vegetable and fruit each week. Add to it a specific shopping list and get the new items in the refrigerator. New experience buying the items and getting used to having the new items (seeing them in the refrigerator). Just do this every week. As long as we add some good, do something new toward the solution, then we have made progress. Focusing on slight improvements and continued growth is the goal. Each day our minds ought to be set upon the goal. If we take our focus off the goal we will miss it. We set simple achievable goals, goals we believe we can accomplish, and then do it.



Think of a situation where you or another person changed a habit. Share with each other what was done to accomplish change. Discuss the process of coming to the decision to change and then putting it into action. What actions did the person make following the decision? What might it have felt like?

New experience does a lot to the mind and body. First time driving, riding a bike, walking, eating sugar, scoring a goal, going to school, etc. There are a lot of new sensations in simple first time experiences. The same goes as we put into practice things out of our normal routine. They may feel abnormal because they are abnormal. We want abnormal because our normal isn't working for us anymore.

It is beneficial to continue with immediate followed up practices with rest in between. Our minds have a lot to digest and understand. How we perceive our experiences develops our belief about the experience. Did we perceive it as good, evil, productive, or unproductive? Do I want to do it again? Do I believe it was beneficial or a waste of time? These are some questions our minds will often seek to answer, sometimes unconsciously which can dictate whether we will be willing to do them again. The more our minds seek to convince us not to do it the more likely we won't. Yet remember, our minds are trained to do what it knows how to do and to convince us to do it. If we want to do something our minds are not trained to do we may face resistance.

This too, with spiritual progression. First time praying, confessing, going to church or support group, etc. How we define and perceive the experience can affect whether we repeat it and how we repeat it. Many times we judge situations based upon our personal experience of it. If our experience informs us something is painful and others tell us it's fun, we usually will discount what others say and go with our own understanding. We may also think something is wrong with us and continue. (value of seeing others change)

Defense Mechanisms

Everyone gets defensive (Do you think, 'Not me?' or "I'm different")
Defense Mechanisms <https://psychcentral.com/lib/15-common-defense-mechanisms/>

Denial may be the most often talked about defense mechanism although there are others. Within us lies a defense system to reject or defend against information that can make us feel uncomfortable or wrong. Most of us will avoid understanding our errors and correction opportunities. Excuses & justifications to avoid the discomfort of change are common; "I don't have time," "too tired," "too hot," "too cold," "I can do it later," "what will people think," or "no one else is doing it." Yet being with God is something we can do anywhere and in any situation. It's simply taking action with our hearts, minds, and attitude toward God's good. Faith is about belief which is about our mindset and thoughts.

Willingness to except discomfort as a part of our process and then focussing on the good grace benefits can increase our desire to proceed. In setting our thoughts on God's good, we can help alleviate some of our perceived

discomfort or losses (because we just changed our perception) and move more quickly into the process of correction. By focusing on God's good instead of failure etc. we can see better the next right and good thing to do. The faster we get moving to produce good results the less time we will experience error. (We ought to practice switching our thinking to good and begin the change process.)

[Worksheet 1 https://psych.wisc.edu/braun/281/Personality/Defense.htm](https://psych.wisc.edu/braun/281/Personality/Defense.htm)

[Worksheet 2 https://ic.arc.losrios.edu/~hokersl/ModuleD/printables/Worksheet_DefenseMechanisms.pdf](https://ic.arc.losrios.edu/~hokersl/ModuleD/printables/Worksheet_DefenseMechanisms.pdf)

Self Fulfilling Prophecy

Self Fulfilling Prophecy - No matter what you believe, your right!

We often believe ourselves more than others and seek information to validate our beliefs. Our beliefs will affect our attitude that can affect how others treat us which can reinforce our beliefs. For instance, a person who believes nobody cares about them can act in a distrusting and defensive manner that can illicit disinterest in others which can bring results to fulfill the belief that nobody cares.

Example ~ A person who believes nobody cares may challenge those who act like they care. They might test the other person and outright say, "you don't care." Then the battle is on. Not many of us will stick it out giving up our time and resources to prove we care to someone who so defiantly refuses our care. Eventually we will need to move on at which point the person will say, "see, I told you you didn't care."

Some more examples:

"I can't trust" - seeks information to validate not trusting

"Love hurts" - seeks information to validate how love can hurt

"Asking for help is..."

"Generosity"

“Peace ...” “Being merciful ...” “Forgiveness ...”

Once we can recognize our own doubts, defensiveness, and biased beliefs then we can seek out the implementation of God’s character. We must not wait until we feel like doing it. We can’t feel like doing it until we can see the good in it. To see the good in it we must do it. We ought to improve our attitude toward that of God’s character little by little.

If we can change our attitude and actions to better bring the results God wants, then we may be able to witness more Godly changes or evidence contrary to our misguided and ungodly beliefs. Yet if we continue to act as if evil things will happen, that action could illicit such results. Therefore, we must be thorough about examining our attitudes, efforts and actions. How well are our attitudes, efforts, and actions aligning with God’s will? Can we improve them? Is our mental attitude seeking growth toward good or focussing on doubt?

What results in others might our character defects bring about? Let’s look our attitudes and how they might affect others and ourselves.

When other people are impatient with me I feel (describe feeling) and respond by (describe thoughts and actions).

When other people lie to me...

When other people hold grudges with me...

When other people ignore, avoid, or withhold from me...

When other people are angry with me...

When other people use or take from me...

When we have experiences like the above, within our minds we can produce defensive responses that can illicit within others a similar response and create a cycle of indifference, separation, and spiritual destruction. God’s ways point toward forgiveness, giving, mercy, truth, justice, and love. Conversations that involve some conflict are necessary to help fix such indifferences. Yet our conversations will benefit from an attitude of humility, patience, gentleness, and love.

Just like the preconception information we discussed earlier, once a belief has taken hold, it takes more information to change the belief than if a belief did not exist. For us to grow with faith, we must patiently seek convincing information into God's goodness. It is up to us, our choice, effort, actions and willingness to believe truth contrary to any indifferent current understanding.

Facing Resistance

Psychological Momentum

Momentum affects us. ([psychological momentum](http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100352743)) <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100352743>

It is often said by sports announcers, "the momentum is changing." When teams begin doing well, scoring points and making plays, their faith in winning the game rises which greatly affects their performance. Likewise when a team fails a number of times (see also Learned Helplessness) the team loses faith.

When our belief is shifting either in support or against our goals its movement and direction can set us up for success or failure. When all indicators around us say we will fail; others believe we will fail (like fans), our past results failed, society acts as though we will fail, and we find ourselves failing, it's not easy to think to ourselves, "I can do this." It takes a lot of faith and hope to overcome such situations and change the momentum. There are many who do overcome this obstacle. It not only can happen, it does happen.

In order for myself to succeed I needed to disregard what other's thought about me. In order to improve my life I needed to let go of associations that would speak messages of "I can't."

People who accomplish amazing feats often take an attitude of intense rebellion against popular thought and attitude. It wouldn't be amazing if everyone thought it was possible. We may need to refuse to cooperate with or accept other's doubt (believe we can't). We made need to act as if everyone is 'wrong' if our 'right' goes against other's beliefs. If we believe we are supposed to speak the truth, but lie to avoid conflict, we miss the mark. Sometimes, we will need to speak the truth when others around us believe we

should lie. And others may think poorly of us for doing what is right. The Bible appears to be full of information suggesting Christians ought to live this way, in rebellion of popular ideology.

I grew up around such conditions. Dysfunction was all around me. Lies, selfishness, pride, anger, exploitation, and the like. I came to believe there was nothing good in the world. I never really experienced love. I went to college and my friends did not. So I began to make new friends that had more Godly character. I got sober and pursued God. I took psychology classes, began purifying my heart and mind, with meditation and prayer. I met people who had sincere compassion for others. The world I knew was changing or so it seemed. Yet it wasn't the world that changed, it was me and my experiences. Faith would pour into me at meetings and I sought a new understanding about my life and God. This searching and change of habits was required. It is difficult to give up old beliefs, but for growth, it must be done. If I did not change my associations, I may have relapsed. When I told a good friend of mine I did not want him coming around me while he was on drugs, he stopped calling.

Each of us will be responsible to get the ball rolling. What we choose to think and do each day will affect our soul development. Once we get going it can get easier, but we must keep it going in Godly development direction within our hearts, minds, and activities. Every choice of each day will have an effect. What we think to ourselves will also affect our attitude and beliefs. We ought to continue to seek progress each day a little at a time.

Inertia

Rule of inertia ~ basic definition is to resist change

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inertia>

We are made up of matter so it shouldn't be too surprising to understand how laws of matter affect us. Who argues against gravity? When our bodies and minds are trained and set to move in a certain motion, way, and manner, it only makes sense we will resist changing direction. It takes far more effort, focus, energy, and time to adapt to change. The greater the difference or change, the greater the struggle to adapt.

Someone might argue "what about the spontaneous individual who can't sit still and does something different all the time, they always change." Such a

person's constant pursuit of change is their way, manner, and norm. Yet how would they respond to switching from constant change to a continuous structure that doesn't change? If such a person is placed in a position to do the same thing day after day they would likely resist it because for them that is new and different. Eliminating spontaneity may be quite challenging for this type. Many people can spend their lives seeking out constant distractions and refuse being still or calm. A person like this who "has to" stay busy may struggle when it is time to meditate. Being calm and at peace may feel threatening to who they are and what they are used to doing.

Simple solutions can be difficult to accept (Example: "Just say no") Telling some to go in solitude or meditate when they struggle with it could be an example of a simple solution. Over simplification of a very difficult process often bring little good result. The challenge and discomfort one can face trying such simple solutions will often convince them out of doing it. It's like telling an alcoholic, "Don't drink" or a Christian, "give all you have to the poor and live as Jesus did." Our inward life needs training to understand how to adjust.

When our lives are geared to move a certain direction adjustments are not easy. Moving, divorce, career change, family losses, physical losses, and financial losses all require very difficult adjustments that require much energy, effort, diligence, focus, and learning, with new thoughts, emotions, and activities.

As we give ourselves more and more over to God's ways and purposes we will be faced with such struggles and inward demands. We will need to convince ourselves to choose God despite discomforts and added work loads.

Our spiritual solution can bring us more love, joy, unity, and peace. It only requires our obedience, adherence, and reliance upon God, to God, and for God. It's the choice that is difficult, especially when we focus on the cost of our effort and struggle. Let's instead look hard at the peace we may receive from giving ourselves over to it.

Cognitive dissonance

“the **mental discomfort** (psychological stress) experienced by a person who simultaneously holds two or more contradictory **beliefs, ideas, or values.**”
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cognitive_dissonance

Once we adapt a way to do things and perhaps practice such a way for years, it becomes a struggle to accept new ideas, especially when there is a group of others involved who have done the same. The willingness to consider ideas contrary to our understanding or experience is necessary to learn anything new. If we quickly discount new information because it does not fit with our understanding we may be acting in **contempt**.

Learning new ideas and behaviors to replace what we believe can create confusion. Confusion can be uncomfortable and convicting truth that our ideas are wrong can hurt. When we are shown our way of doing things is wrong it can be humbling. It can be easier to ignore new information than to accept it and try to figure out how to adjust. For growth and improvement, some suffering is often the case. Some say, “no pain, no gain.”



In what ways do we improve through effort, perseverance, discomfort, or suffering? Share with each other personal experience in how developing new character can be difficult to do, but bring good things. Does the struggle or discomfort make it more difficult to choose to continue?

Applying the will of God is not a mindless activity. On the contrary, it is a continuous conscious effort. We ought to apply a continuous effort to further our development of discernment, introspection, and seek to correct our inward condition.

There are two things we ought to continuously learn more about; good and evil. Evil leads to spiritual destruction. Good leads to spiritual improvement. Adding in a new good that disagrees with our evil ways will involve Cognitive Dissonance. We ought to first learn about good, then practice the good and see what happens, evaluate the experience to see the good in it, and then repeat the process to learn some more. (Scientific Method)

God's will is not black and white. God is subjective and intangible. We will need to investigate and we ought to challenge our own beliefs as we explore new ideas.

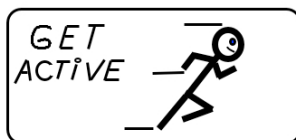
The will of God complies with the collective Godly character traits; love, mercy, truth, justice, forgiveness, peace, patience, compassion, and generosity. Such principles cannot perfectly be defined in words nor taught using language. They need to be learned through experience and collective reasoning. Collective reasoning through collaboration of other growth minded individuals can help us in many ways. We can share our experiences together, learn from each other's different perspectives upon such experiences, and learn about our own biased beliefs.

Influenced by others

Authority

As spiritual people who follow a program of doing God's will we ought to ensure we are paying close attention to God and then evaluating ourselves to ensure we are indeed doing God's will. Many of us, unfortunately, will be deceived by our obedience to our chosen authority. We will claim God with our words, but our actions may say otherwise.

We will need to choose each day what we will serve. Perhaps our choice will be not to think about it which essentially is choosing to accept what we currently believe and follow (auto pilot). We will end up choosing seek to grow serve something whether it is money, pride, self gratification, fear, anger, or God's ways of peace and love. We are alive and functioning. Our minds focus somewhere. We ought to ensure each day our thoughts and actions seek Godly productivity.



Please share a time when you gave everything within you to serve God. What changes did that bring about? How can such devotion affect our attitude, goals, priorities, and actions?

God's character ought to be the authority we obey. We ought to rely upon God and depend upon God alone. Teachers, mentors, sponsors, preachers,

and congregations are great when they are with God, but when they fall short, as we all do, they are no longer good. Sometimes, we can try to keep together friends, family, groups, and congregations that are not good at the expense of our spiritual values and sanity. When we seek to avoid conflict or awkwardness we can sometimes invalidate good messages from others. This can be like trying to sweep problems under the rug. Differences ought to be discussed with patience, truth, and love. There ought to be a structure to embrace differences openly. We ought not to fear conflict or disagreement. The minute our actions become guided by fear is when fear becomes our God. We will need to choose obey fear or God's good.

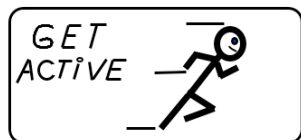
There have been many times where fear and faith were present within my heart and mind. The battle of two authorities trying to win my allegiance. One would be the inviting me to do the right and good thing and the other not so good. Back and forth within my thoughts exists a tug of war where I stand observing. Yet I am the one that will choose the victor. It is extremely important to consult with God and God's good through prayer and meditation to help with such choices. Video ([Two wolves - Mindfulness](#))

Many times we can experience fear of what other people think about us. Our image or reputation may be on the line. We can fear how our employer might react. We might fear hurting someone's feelings or a person's anger. We might fear retaliation. There are many reasonable things to fear regarding other people, but ultimately we are to fear (revere) God far more than any person. This again all develops from our choices. Who or what are we going to choose to be our ultimate authority?

Obedience

Obedience to authority ~ watch the link below

[Milgram Experiment](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xOYLCy5PVgM) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xOYLCy5PVgM>



Who is our ultimate authority? What do our actions say we serve with our time and resources/money? Do our loved ones believe we obey God? Can we serve God more? Will we choose God above all else? Are we willing to abandon ourselves to God?

Matthew 16:23 “But He turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.’”

We ought to refuse evil and obey good as our authority. Spiritual principles (God’s ways) must come before personalities (our ways). This calls for a constant spiritual awareness, introspection, and deeper spiritual discernment. Refusing to cooperate with evil at the expense of disapproval and personal comforts for the sake of doing what is spiritually good and right is a key part of our spiritual development. Do we love God more than family, money, reputation, and belongings? Is simply being with God enough? Do we participate in lies and evil at the expense of intimacy with loved ones. Do we withhold giving and caring while seeking out self gratification? If our spouse or boss expects us to lie, do we?

When we choose to turn our will and life over to the instruction of someone or something acting upon evil purposes, we choose to let that evil into our soul, mind, and heart. Who or what we serve from within us affects our inward condition.

1 Timothy 6:10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

Self deception exists within us. Lies come about within our thoughts prompting us toward sin. Confusion, misunderstanding, fear, vanity, greed, lust, gluttony, conformity, people pleasing, etc. all can dissuade us from God’s purpose and will. Little by little we can make corrections and improve our inward spiritual condition. This will require a plan, structure and reliance upon that structure. Let’s keep God’s character within our hearts and thoughts with daily goals grow. We must love God above all else.

Practicing self examination throughout each day can help us correct and adjust more toward God. Let’s not fear seeing how we are misguided. We are all misguided in ways. Those of us who can face this fact and make corrections regularly are those who may be more likely to grow with God.

Helping others is part of the journey, but how do we choose who to help or when to help? Why would we help others? Do we have personal preferences? If so,



what are they? We ought to know our inward motivations and priorities. Watch the link below and discuss the results. Explore why people are doing what they are doing. How can we improve?

This next video link highlights how we prefer to help others based upon appearances.

Help homeless man or business man

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iPehw67L91w>

Conformity/Herd Mentality

Watch the links below to discuss conformity
(keep in mind conformity is a great thing when done so with God's will)

What would you do in these situations? Have you seen this in real life? Take time to discuss these and other similar experiences.

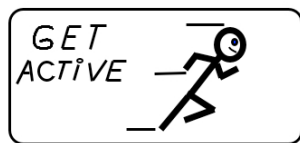
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bV5ngreR7Hk> (Herd Mentality)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o8BkzvP19v4> (waiting room)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ft7mwyiPyIo> (standing ovation)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BgRoiTWkBHU> (Elevator)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dDAbdMv14Is> (Elevator redone)

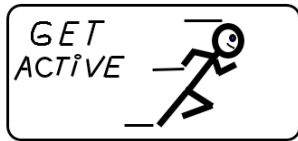


Do we evaluate what we are doing to ensure we do them for the right reasons or do we mindlessly go through the motions following others? Do we stop to ask questions to understand reasons and purpose for what we do to ensure it is right with God's will?

Do we stand because others stand? Do we sit because others sit? Why or why not? What would happen if we sat while everyone else stood and stood while everyone else sat? How often do we simply go through the motions? We ought to examine our actions to see how often we are influenced to do things to follow the flow of others around us.

Bystander Effect

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wy6eUTLzcU4>



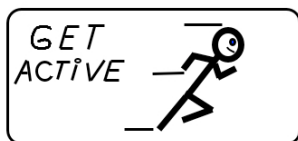
Imagine helping others at the risk of standing out in a crowd. Have you done it? Share your thoughts and feelings about this idea. How much of our helping involves fear, worry, control, or what other people might think or do? Are we considering what God wants more than what we want or what others want? Are we willing to stand out in a crowd for God?

Staying Active

It is a natural, normal, and healthy thing to react toward how others act. If someone becomes frightened we ought to consider they might see danger we do not see. It may be good to take caution even if the other person is deceived. If someone yells fire and runs out of a building, but they run alone while others ignore that person, it may be good to watch for smoke or investigate first before following or ignoring them. And if it seems like everyone is leaving a building wouldn't we go with them or would we stay in the building alone?

Many will stay with the masses, follow the crowd, and walk with the mainstream to do what they do because it is easier and seemingly more comfortable. Taking responsibility can be uncomfortable.

John Mayer sings in his song "waiting for the world to change"
"Now we see everything that's going wrong
With the world and those who lead it
We just feel like we don't have the means
To rise above and beat it
So we keep waiting (waiting)
Waiting on the world to change
We keep on waiting (waiting)
Waiting on the world to change"



Are we waiting? Should we be waiting? Are we applying all our heart, strength, mind, and soul to love

God? Would it be too much for us to add 15 minutes of prayer and delete 15 minutes of leisure activity? Are we in a support group set to grow in Godly character?

Group Think

“Groupthink is a psychological **phenomenon** that occurs within a **group of people** in which the desire for harmony or conformity in the group results in an irrational or dysfunctional **decision-making** outcome. Group members try to minimize conflict and reach a consensus decision without **critical evaluation** of alternative viewpoints by actively suppressing dissenting viewpoints, and by isolating themselves from outside influences.”

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Groupthink>

I was at a church small group once many years ago and a pastor posed a question to the group that went something like, “how do you think this church could grow?” I asked if the church has ever had an outside consultant evaluate the church. The pastor quickly laughed at the idea and changed the subject. I felt cut off and redirected like I was unwanted. This has happened to many of my shared ideas. Change often doesn’t happen until it has to happen.

The Groupthink scenario can come about in different ways. In keeping focused on solutions, let’s look together at this example.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2p-uY_i-wvc

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ubHEssty_HM

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kRW8vgoHOWg>

<https://www.wikihow.com/Prevent-Groupthink>

In order to grow we must be in situations which challenge us to grow. If we never have thoughts that challenge us to grow it will be highly unlikely that growth will occur. It may be beneficial to educate our groups about Groupthink to ensure protection against it. We ought to guard carefully from, “the collective **confirmation bias** of the individual members of the group”

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Groupthink>

Some helpful practices

Setting a schedule: Hurried vs. Unhurried

Good samaritan experiment 1973 Princeton seminary students
Participants were on their way to give a teaching about “The good samaritan”
Some participants had more time while on their way than others

Findings

People in a rush were less likely to help a person in need.

10% of hurried participants helped
over %60 not hurried participants helped

If we create a hurried schedule we may miss an opportunity to help others. For example, when I leave to go to work I leave with a time budget to simply get to my destination. I’m not adding extra time for just in case someone might need some help. On most occasions I leave 10 minutes early to avoid any rush or worry. I leave early for my own comfort of peace. I’m beginning to see how thinking ahead for possible scenarios of where I can be helpful is to grow with God. Thinking ahead like this and taking such action is to give opportunity to grow in God’s grace and goodness.

Slowing down with God’s patience & peace

God’s goodness is continuously all around us in many ways. Are we looking for it? If our minds are not set to look for it, we will miss it. And missing God is missing the mark or sin. Setting our minds right with God to think about God’s goodness, grace, principles, and character is essential for us to find it. We must be willing to take progressive action to seek and experience God. If we don’t see it, we can always create it by doing God’s will.

violinist at the metro <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UM21gPmkDpI>

Pacing ourselves with patience, moving slower, and making adjustments (leaving earlier), can be helpful.



Love and peace are part of the plan, but are they part of our plan, our attitude, and our thinking? Do we

maintain a schedule with time for compassion, patience, and helping others? Love is the essential ingredient that must be within our plan, schedule, and goals. Are we moving at a pace to love?

We are in a spiritual war and the battle exist within our minds and hearts. The only way to victory is to set our minds and hearts more and more with God's will, grace, character, goodness, and righteousness. Getting our Inward Authority correct requires regular correction.

As stated in the book Alcoholics Anonymous, "It is easy to let up on the spiritual program of action and rest on our laurels. We are headed for trouble if we do, for alcohol is a subtle foe. We are not cured of alcoholism. What we really have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition." Pg. 85

We can easily replace the word alcohol/alcoholism in the above quote with self-seeking or idolatry to see how it fits. So, each day we are to seek God with all our heart, strength, mind, and soul. Let's keep at it!

Collaboration

Collaboration with others who also seek the will of God is essential to help us see what our limited minds cannot see. Self awareness is best improved within long term close relationships with honest feedback and responses (essence of group therapy).

Once we begin practicing truth at all levels others around us will be better situated to provide us honest feedback. If we are busy lying and creating a false presentation, feedback from others will be more limited. If we are honest and are around others who are honest then the chance of getting honest feedback is much greater.

Many people get what is called a "reality check" with trusted supports. Since we all fall victim of distorting reality through our assumptions and biased perceptions it is very helpful to get together with others to share and hear insights.

Hearing how others relate to our experience can create empathy, affirmation, conflict, and belonging or eliminate the "I thought it was just me"/feeling alone affect. Hearing personal success from others can provide hope and

encouragement. The spirit exists within each of us and even more when we sincerely engage with each other utilizing what may be Carl Jung's idea of the [Collective Unconscious](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collective_Unconscious). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collective_unconscious

Witnessing other people improve can be the best evidence that things work. Advertisers use personal testimonies from stars all the time to point to how their products can help. Seeing is believing. And with this process we can come to Inward Authority groups and watch it work in others if we are patient, persistent, and objective.

We all know we make mistakes. We can use others input to help guide our decisions about ourselves and what we do if we are humble and willing. Our vanity, pride, ego, or arrogance can sometimes block God's grace of humility to see where we are wrong.

In some 12 step meetings it is said, "If it walks like a duck, quacks like a duck, it's probably a duck." When we resist change we can resist information supporting the need for change. If other people are suggesting we are resistant and misled by our thinking, we ought to be willing to consider it may be true, especially if it's the whole group saying it. We ought to listen for information from others as objectively as possible to see if it is right.

Blind men and elephant story (sharing together to understand more of the collective reality)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blind_men_and_an_elephant

It's incredibly important to have a flexible and open mind to objectively test new information against our beliefs and let the evidence show the truth for what it is. If we cling too tight to our own beliefs and discount others without considering the facts we may be blinded by contempt. A contemptuous attitude will not only hurt ourselves, but can sabotage the good of the group. Each groups effectiveness may be limited to the how well each participant is spiritually formed. If the majority of the participants are deceived, that deception can dominate the groups mentality.

When dishonest sharing comes about in the group, we ought to be able to discuss it patiently with love, even if others feel hurt. Hurt happens and will always come and go. Yet we must be striving to improve with God's character gently and boldly with mercy and forgiveness.

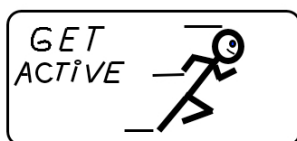
Humility

Humility is the key to freedom from our biases, preferences, and entitlements. If we can humble ourselves enough to let go of 'our way' and cling to God's character of truth, forgiveness, patience, mercy, compassion, justice, love, and peace, we can experience life more through God's grace. Seeking God's will involves setting aside our own ideas, wants, and expectations while acting upon God's love and tolerance. As we grow in God reliance we can become less self-reliant and dependent upon our own personal leanings. As we experience and learn from God's Grace we will realize how good it is and perhaps understand how our old ideas were not so good.

That said, we ought to remember Godly character involves justice and truth. Speaking up with the attitude of love, patience, and tolerance better equips us to stand for justice and truth. Who wants to hear the truth from someone full of anger, anxiety, or fear? So let's first better develop peace, patience, mercy, and love before trying to help others. There is an old saying in some 12 step groups, "Carry the message, not the mess."

Matthew 7:3 NKJV And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?

Introspection (We ought to learn about our thinking)



Do we think about our thinking? Do we evaluate how we make decisions? Do we create new messages to guide and encourage ourselves? What do we think when we make mistakes? What messages do we use in our minds for self-motivation? Are we thinking the way God wants us to think?

"Introspection is the examination of one's own conscious thoughts and feelings."

"Introspection can determine any number of mental states including: sensory, bodily, cognitive, emotional and so forth"

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Introspection>

Introspection

- Examination, observation, record taking, learning our thoughts/choices and how they affect us.

2 Corinthians 10:5 casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,

Those who grow with introspection can increasingly improve their skill at it and empower themselves toward more self control. In meditation we can improve our ability to evaluate our thoughts. As we pray it can be helpful to listen quietly in reflection for messages. New ideas can come if we are open to them and taking new action.

Serenity Prayer - setting our hearts and minds toward God

“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.” Author Unknown

Serenity (patience & peace) is the goal that enables us to accept the things we cannot change. Serenity is to avoid fighting and wrestling with reality that does not fit with our beliefs. Slowing ourselves down empowers us to evaluate more clearly and carefully our present condition and inward messages, attitudes, and beliefs. When we are rushed or quickly multitasking we weaken our ability to give close attention to our thoughts. Remember, our thoughts are often quickly jumping to incorrect conclusions and we ought to be moving in the direction of making changes. So it may be better to learn to slow down to empower ourselves into a deeper awareness of our thinking. God is patience and peace. To be with God it may be best to develop this attitude and behavior of patience and peace.

As we increase our focus and attention toward God’s will, character, and principles, we can empower ourselves for greater participation with that will. Sometimes our own understanding/self knowledge will be in conflict with Godly wisdom. Setting aside our own understanding for the development of spiritual understanding can help us improve spiritually.

Cleaning and purifying

Cleansing our conscience and purifying our hearts is the essence of spiritual development. We are impure. We sin. What makes us unclean is our participation with destructive choices that lead to regret, anger, lies, worry, selfish ambition, hurt relationships, dullness and/or emptiness. What can keep us unclean is our refusal to obey God. Denial and avoidance from convicting truth happens and sometimes seemingly without much thought. Failure to see our spiritual error can further our destruction. Avoidance of corrective action can keep us away from God's grace. Correction is needed which means we ought to develop progress toward a pure and Godly way of thinking, feeling, and living.

We must first see our spiritual error. Confession is a great beginning. Confession can be helpful to bring a sense of humility that may change our hard-heartedness and stiff neck. Understanding our spiritual error with depth can empower us to recognize when it happens and our prompting thoughts involved with leading us into it. The depth of our understanding about our thoughts, habits, and triggers is an important part of the process.

We must have faith that God can help us and that we can receive grace for corrective action. If we are willing to rely upon and trust God we can turn and be saved. If we confess with a belief we are stuck and cannot change then we may be right. Our belief can keep us from accepting and receiving an attitude toward change. We must move our thoughts away from telling ourselves things which block us from receiving grace and God's goodness. We must seek out God's character and improve our understanding of it.

Not sin management

It is important to understand that avoidance of evil activity does not fill the heart with goodness or grace. Sin management or staying away from character defects only keep us from further producing harmful behavior. Avoiding evil is not the same as growing in good. Avoiding hurt is not the same as producing love. Improving our spiritual condition requires us to participate in Godly thinking and acting.

Decreasing harm and reducing actions which bring pain can help us feel better. Less pain is an improvement. Let's not be deceived into the thinking following the spirit of error less is making us productive in the spirit of truth. To grow in goodness and righteousness we must act in goodness and righteousness. Sin means to miss the mark. God is the mark. To hit the mark

we must act in God's will. Repent means to turn to God, meaning we ought to do God's will.

To do God's will and be effective with certainty we ought to carefully evaluate ourselves with others to ensure we are more humble, sincere, truthful, patient, forgiving, peaceful, merciful, just, compassionate, loving, and generous.

Willingness & commitment

Recommended reading: [Alcoholics Anonymous pg. 51 - 55](https://www.aa.org/assets/en_US/en_bigbook_chapt4.pdf)
https://www.aa.org/assets/en_US/en_bigbook_chapt4.pdf

In 12 step programs there is a common saying, "willing to go to any length." Are we willing to go to any length to right ourselves with God? Is God's first and great commandment important enough to us to give our all to love God?

Realistically this means we give everything to God. We give all our resources and time to God. Is God that important to us? Our choices and actions will determine this fact. If we are increasingly growing with God's character then God is increasingly in our thoughts and goals. If we rarely think about God, what God wants for us to do, how to live more in God's ways, then it may not be accurate or honest to say God is the most important thing to us.

We ought to avoid judging ourselves by our intentions. It's helpful to take a long look at Abraham and what Abraham did. We are to have the faith of Abraham. Having good intentions without action may be insufficient for the spiritual results we desire.

Doing things differently can be challenging. It requires us to choose to do things we may not feel inclined to do. In the beginning this may happen a lot. Rarely will change come without willingness and dedication to the process.

Are we willing to give to God; time, effort, wants, money, desires, relationships, habits, hobbies, preferences, rituals, careers, etc. God's greatest commandment is to love God with all our heart, all our mind, all our strength, and all our soul. Notice the word 'all' and how many times it is used. It is emphasized and focused throughout the Bible.

Are we willing to give our 'all' to God? For many of us we only need to maintain continued subtle progressive growth. We don't have to be perfect, but we do need to continue in applied effort, diligence, and action. It is important we continue to grow throughout our life. Idleness, complacency, and resting upon laurels can descend us down the path of spiritual destruction. This also is a consistent theme in the Bible. People have been obstinate and rebellious throughout history. And rarely to do good things happen to them.

We ought to seek good, but remember to rest frequently. We ought to rest for replenishment and healing which build God's character. We ought to always continue doing God's will and growing in Godly character even as we rest. We never actually rest from trusting God's love and truth.

A common sin is "working for the weekend" mentality. Waiting until we get time off to have fun, selfish fun, self-pleasing rewards, and ungodly activity. It's important to consider why we work and for what reason we want money. Is it to better serve God or "to keep up with the Jones"? The weekend or time off is an opportunity to develop more love and peace. Perseverance, continuance, and endurance are essential for roots to take hold and a foundation to be made.

Service ought to be done with love as well. How is our heart? Are we serving God with love and compassion? Are we distracted, fearful, angry, or hurt? Perhaps we need some guidance, examination, confession and prayer?

When we grow we become different which involves change and adaptation to a new way of life. Our attitude, preferences, interests, and behavior ought to change with increased alignment to God's will. Other's reactions toward us can change. Our social structure can change. We may feel like a different person and have some confusion about our new identity. Learning that changes character can be challenging, but very beneficial as long as we continue to grow with God. More truth, compassion, patience, and love are excellent qualities, but adjusting to them can feel very out of place.

Less evil & more good

Do evil less and good more. It's not complicated action, it's a struggle within our conscience to accept the action and the new results. We can easily define good as the collective character traits; love, mercy, forgiveness, patience,

peace, compassion, truth, justice, and generosity. Evil will go against such things. Watch the clip from the link below. Keep in mind how simple instructions can be challenging to accept (Example - Love God with all heart, mind, soul, & strength)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SjKsz34PDn0>

Serve self less and God more.

Instead of thinking about how difficult applying the solution might be, we ought to think how we can put it into practice. Focusing on the problem, loss, or fear sets us up to fail. Let's talk about solutions together. How we can speak the truth more, be sincere, forgive, be generous, patient, peaceful, etc. Instead of theorizing, we test and practice solutions.