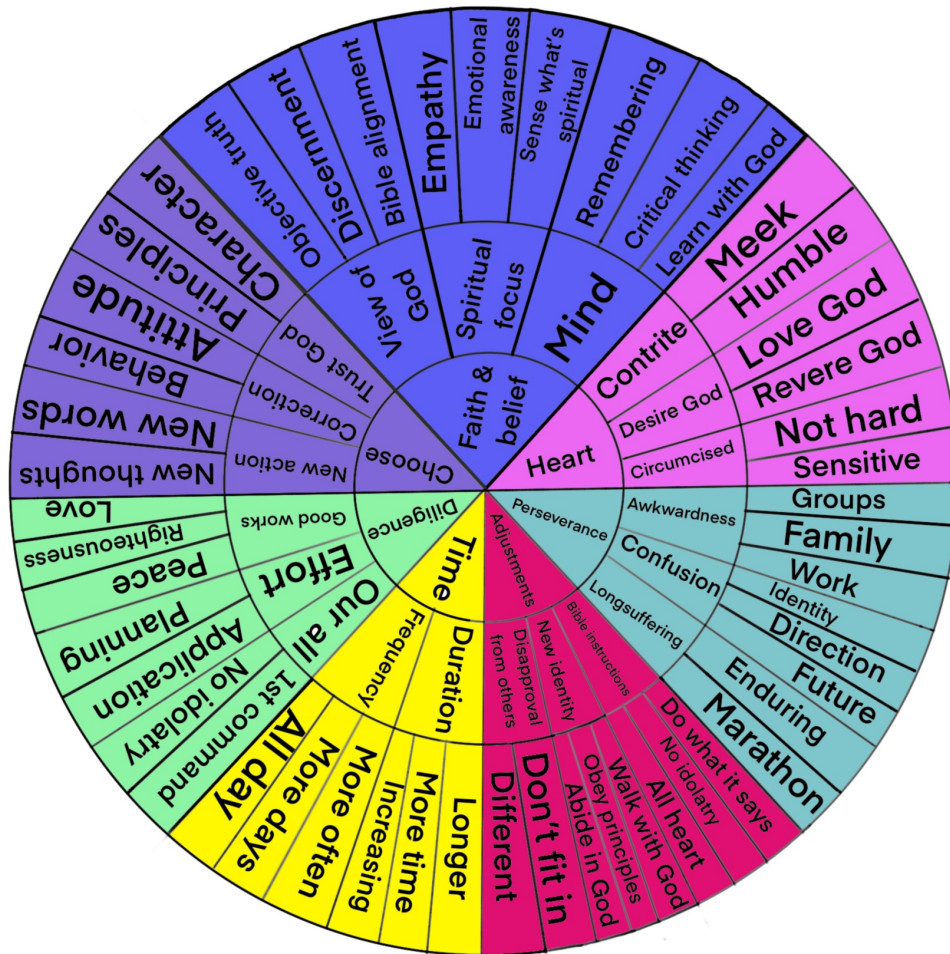


Elements for growth



By Wayne R. Schmidt

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Elements for Growth

Spiritual growth involves every part of our being. Every choice we make with our thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and actions will affect us spiritually. And how we are spiritually also will affect others around us. Because the Kingdom of God is so vast and complex we are incapable of completely understanding God. Yet we are fully capable of growing our understanding of God if we apply ourselves with God's ways. Experience is needed for the best understanding.

Audio Link

<https://soundcloud.com/inwardauthority/growth-fromula-decide-and-commit>

It is crucial to understand we are all imperfect people. Some of us will strive toward perfection with God. Striving is to apply the elements for growth. Anyone can avoid striving or application. We have all been given authority to choose our actions. Even though many of us have accepted beliefs which can limit ourselves from taking action. (see [learned helplessness](#), [self fulfilling prophecy](#))

We will all continue to have problems and make mistakes. It won't be hard to point the finger and find fault. In many ways we can be easily self-deceived. (see [cognitive bias](#))

Our responsibility for growth with God is to align our thoughts, attitudes, and choices progressively and continually with God and God's ways. We ought to set simple achievable goals and keep our minds concentrated upon our improved thoughts and actions. We all have room to grow and can do this. Thinking about mistakes without looking at the solution can create more problems. Let us keep focused upon the limitless load of solutions available in the Bible and the Spirit within us.

We will each grow differently in our strengths, experiences, knowledge, and abilities. This is not a competition toward each other. We race toward God, but do so together, to help one another. Listening, reaching out, and sharing our journey with each other can help us grow.

There are many continuous patterns within the Bible which highlight instructions toward us. Over and over within the Bible we are to seek, follow, obey, trust, rely, believe, think, and ponder God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. This is repeated from Moses to Jesus with Abraham being the example of faith.

Although this process is complicated we can simplify it by keeping our minds focused each day upon taking a few easy steps. With each small simple step we can build our experiential understanding of God's goodness and grace. As we meet together to share our experience we can learn from one another. Small continuous growth over just a few weeks or sometimes days can have a powerful affect.

The Elements for Growth can be something like a formula. This formula when applied daily can produce life changing spiritual results which can be sensed by ourselves and others around us. We can feel and perceive the world very differently. Enhancing our spiritual senses can open our eyes and ears to things we haven't noticed before.

This formula involves spiritual and inward parts of ourselves.

Growth rate & depth = amount of time (soul) + amount of diligence
(strength) + amount of heart (passion) + amount of thought (mind) +
amount of adjusting to Bible content + amount of spiritual focus

The formula involves our progression to fulfill the first and greatest commandment of God. Growing our inward alignment with this command has always been the spiritual solution and the way to salvation.

Decisions and commitment

Overwhelmed is how many of us can feel when facing a new project or training. The concentration needed to figure things out and store it to memory can feel like a burden. It's work. So, the question 'why' can become a sticking point. We may need a reason to exert such energy. We will need to explain to ourselves why we should go through the struggle. We each will need to figure out for ourselves why the development of God's ways into our minds, hearts, and souls is worth the sacrifice and investment. We will need to become self-motivated. We won't always have a professional orator coaching us with inspiration. We will need action.

This very basic beginning step will in itself require some time, diligence, heart, thought, study, and spiritual focus. To keep ourselves set to grow with God ought to be our first step each and every day.

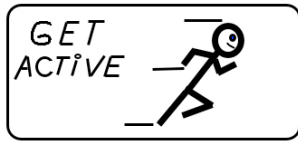
We will need a commitment to begin each day with a focus upon God. It will be our own responsibility to make that happen. God gave us the power over choice. Accepting this responsibility is crucial. If we choose to believe we don't have choice, this lesson will probably not make sense. Everyday we will have a choice to begin with God or not. If we are not thinking of how to serve and follow God's ways, we probably won't. We won't grow much without new action.

New action is something we are still regularly practicing to learn how to do. So when learning how to pray, this can remain new for a period of weeks. But over time, we can adjust to it and accommodate the new action into our being where it feels more normal. So new action can be something we repeat for a while as we get used to it.

Perseverance and endurance are needed. We can learn and grow with each simple application. Momentum can be made once we get going. Once we get going it is easier to continue than to stop and get going again. It will be best to continue training even when we don't feel like it. There may be days when we might not feel like setting our thoughts with God. We ought to do it anyway so we don't drift off course. That can be problematic. Staying the course and standing firm with our spiritual growth is necessary.

We will need to decide whether the Bible is an instruction manual to teach us how to live or only a story book. Is the Bible a guide to grow from or an idol to worship? Are we going to do what it says or use it as a reason to meet together for theorizing and philosophy? Are we going to do what Jesus says or place the idea of Jesus in an unreachable position? Is God's righteousness going to grow within our thoughts, attitudes, and actions or become a folk tale? We will need to decide and commit to the decision as did Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus, and the disciples. We cannot side step the decision and the decision will affect our results.

Once we have decided to grow our participation with the instructions in the Bible the process can begin.



Read Deuteronomy 30:11-20, Ezekiel 18, & John 15. Pray for understanding and strength. Listen with inward senses and reflect upon the scripture. Think how we can actually grow and improve if we practice more of the good God has been offering us. Little steps each day is all that is required to grow. We can do it.

Perception - How we view God

Audio

<https://soundcloud.com/inwardauthority/growth-formula-perception>

Our faith is dependent upon our perception. The grace that saves is accessed by faith. (See Romans 5:2, Ephesians 2:8, 3:12) It's important to learn, understand, and accept what accessed through faith means. We also need to accept that our belief and faith can change from one moment to the next. How we perceive God, the Bible's information, and ourselves can impact the condition of our faith and access to grace.

Our mood, tolerance, patience, and attitude can be affected by many different things including hunger, pain, loss of life, divorce, finances, etc. As our inward parts become affected, so to our faith can be affected. Our faith can be affected by pride, fear, resentment, love of money, and selfish ambition.

We can have a spiritual experience one day while feeling disconnected another. We can be at peace one minute and then an hour later become distressed. Since God does not change, it must be us. Our thinking and perception changes frequently from one context to the next. Our minds adapt one way at school and another at home. We often can think different at work than we do at church. Perception is part of our faith and we can learn how to help it grow with God.

Since we are not perfect nor have perfect faith, our faith can be improved. Inward Authority is focused to improve faith and the accessing of grace which can save. In order to improve our faith we will need to diligently invest some time into our thoughts, beliefs, and choices. Our beliefs

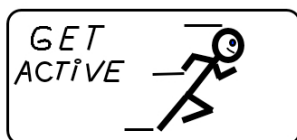
comes through the development of our perception which depends upon our interpretation and discernment.

Interpretation is how we receive information. Discernment is to use judgement about the information. Not everyone uses discernment. We can learn or choose to accept information without discernment. We can discern someone to be trustworthy and accept their information without question. God wants us to discern information and to find the truth. This means we need more careful thought and evaluation. (See 2 Peter 2.) Share together how you interpret, discern, and perceive this message?

Our perception about who God is, who we are, and what our role is with God, will impact results. Since we are to serve and follow God, we ought to practice God's ways correctly. It would be best to write down our understanding of God to check our understanding. Each of us is capable of thinking we know more than we do. With humility and diligence we can find truth about ourselves. This truth coupled with correction and improvement toward God can improve our access with grace.

Next we can take our understanding and see how it matches up with what the Bible says about God. (See [Bible describes God](#))

Ambiguity about our goals and destination can affect our progress. Becoming more clear about the path we ought to take increases our ability to get to where we want to be. Our information, understanding, discernment, and decisions can work together to help us achieve goals. Errors within us can interfere with our access.



Let's review James 1:14-16. Discuss or reflect upon the workings of our thoughts with these verses. How can our thoughts be drawn away toward desires. Can we choose to shift our thoughts from such things?

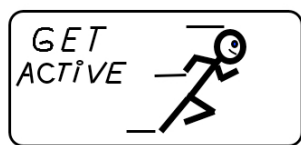
I was in a group once where the leader looked up to the ceiling and said, "who can understand God's righteousness." When I heard this I recalled a [concordance study](#) I had done that indicated strongly how followers of God were to know God's righteousness and practice it. (Matthew 6:33, 1 Cor. 15:34)

God can sometimes be described as something beyond our understanding, grasp, or senses. We cannot fully understand all of who God is but in order to grow and be with God we will need teaching that can help us do it. (1 Cor. 14:33 “God is not the author of confusion”)

We must be careful with our views about God and how we have learned about God. There are false prophets and teachers. We can build discernment and skills in humble evaluation while taking time to verify teachings.

Inwardly, we each struggle with tempting thoughts that do not come from God. They exist. Our own thoughts can be prompting us with false statements and ideas. False beliefs may also exist in our groups. Since God is truth and we are to test all things our groups should not be afraid of questions or some skepticism provided we are humble and sincere. We too, ought to welcome questions about ourselves at the appropriate times. Patience, gentleness, and conversation to seek clarity toward peace with love is the Biblical process of learning. We ought to guard against emotional and personal motivations of fear, pride, hurt, anger, and impatience. A conversation that is hurried or forced would not be agreeing with the Biblical character of God.

We can choose to begin making corrections with how we perceive and learn information. We can build discernment through improving our abilities to analyze, learn to separate facts from opinions, and grow in self awareness. (recommend learning [Asch Conformity Experiment](#), [Herd Mentality](#), and [Group Think](#))



Read 2 Corinthians 10:5 and discuss and reflect upon how we can take captive every thought? Could our ability to evaluate our thoughts improve through daily meditation? If we practiced introspection regularly, could we grow our ability to take captive our thoughts?

The ‘God’s Character & Us’ section at InwardAuthority.com provides some very clear, yet deep Biblical guidance on who God is and what a Biblical Christian’s behavior can look like. Thinking is a behavior. In order to bring

accurate Biblical descriptions about God into our minds requires some reading and rereading. Reading Biblical descriptions about God regularly can help make it more permeant in our thinking.

We can participate in and grow our senses to understand God. The heart and the Spirit involves senses. God is love, compassion, and peace. God is intangible and invisible. Our senses of spiritual character and the kingdom of God can grow through our participation in it. God gave us the Holy Spirit to teach us. We can choose to set our attention to listen to and seek out the spirit's guidance, or not. Some self-discipline may be required.

What we gather within our senses (information) and interpret from that information (perception) will impact our faith. We choose who to be around, what to listen to, read, or watch. The information from such experiences can affect us. (Read a Biblical concordance on the word ['Corrupt'](#) and think about how we can be corrupted.) It's important to realize that the way we interpret and perceive spiritual realities will affect our spiritual condition and cooperation with God.

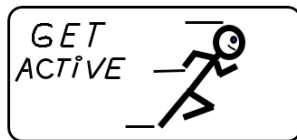
The information that comes to us can be influenced through our choices. The interpretation of that information can be influenced by our careful attention and discernment.

If the Bible is going to be our primary teacher, then we ought to always take what the Bible says above any other source. If a word is not in the Bible, perhaps we ought to think twice before incorporating it into our faith. We all have errors within our beliefs. Even those who grew up in a religion and have learned religious traditions and methods can be filled with information that may not be Biblically accurate. Remember, God is truth. Sometimes religious systems as well as ourselves can twist information to side with them or us. (See [Confirmation Bias](#)) We can more easily welcome information that agrees with our current understanding than truth we do not yet understand. It can be tempting to avoid new complicated truth for the comfort of living in error. Change, growth, and improvement can involve struggle, adapting, self-discipline, and much discomfort.

Inward Authority is about increasing in good while never settling. Complacency can be destructive. We are about taking steps to continue to

align more and more with the Biblical teaching “taking captive every thought” and making corrections. This of course means continuing to change and grow God’s Biblical good. (see a concordance on ‘[Perfect](#)’)

There are some who think “we can’t be perfect” and then stop trying to improve. But what does the Bible say? (See [Matthew 5:48](#)) God wants us to struggle toward what is perfect, but not be perfect.



How do you handle situations that seem to be requiring great strength and courage? Have you ever pushed yourself toward your perfection? If so, how did you become convinced to do it? What motivates and inspires you to fulfill challenging tasks?

It’s important to carry with us a perception and belief that God wants our all. (See the greatest commandment [Deuteronomy 6:5](#), [Luke 10:27](#))

The instructions in the Bible can guide us toward specific ways of thinking and acting. God is described with the character traits; love, mercy, peace, patience, compassion, forgiveness, justice, not partial, and truth. We ought to bring this character more clearly into our minds when seeking God because this character is God. What we bring within our minds when we seek God will impact our growth. This is another very important point that can be best understood through practice and discussion with others.

Discussing our experiences with others can help us interpret and perceive our spiritual experiences more accurately. When other people share experience, it can validate our own experiences. When other people share different experiences, we can learn from them. It’s valuable and beneficial to be in groups where others can openly share the truth. ([blind men & elephant](#))

We ought to guard carefully, peacefully, gently, and patiently against false flattery and condoning falsehood.

It’s best to correct ourselves first and most. We will learn through trial and error how to grow, if we try. Playing it safe, avoiding humility, mistakes, and failures can often limit our development. We can keep it simple by reading

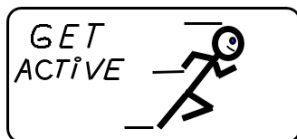
the Bible and practicing more of what it says each day continuing to raise the bar in a way where we feel challenged.

Try, learn, practice, evaluate, improve, & repeat

In order to grow we need to try new things. In order for us to improve we will need to think about our experiences and in order to continue learning we will need to practice and repeat them.

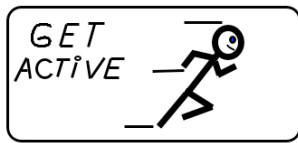
Since we are now about growing with God we will need to set our inward being toward new action with God's character. Growing means we will be different. As we become different we will feel different, but different with God.

We can begin trying new goals with new objectives. With patience we can slow down and practice more waiting. We can seek to be last instead of first. With truth we practice increasing honesty with reduced exaggerations, minimizations, false-flattery, and sarcasm. Growing with God is improving in God's character. If we are growing, others around us ought to notice the changes within us. We will be speaking differently, our demeanor will change, and our attitude will become more kind toward love and peace. Simple gradual changes like using one sincere encouraging word each day can produce an affect.



How does it feel to do things differently? How have you motivated yourself to make changes in the past? How has success or failures in making changes affected your confidence? How can perseverance help?

We will want to remember the spiritual good through our experiences. Two things that help memory are repetition and experience. We can repeat our experiences within our mind during meditation at night. We can review the good encounters we experienced. We can evaluate our kind words and the way we helped others. Reviewing within our minds can help us remember. Consequently, if we review mistakes within our minds it can have the same effect. The only benefit from reviewing mistakes would be to find a solution. If we are not seeking a solution redirecting our thoughts toward God's ways can help. Otherwise, we may be producing anger, worry, or shame.



Reflect upon this point of reviewing experiences. How does our reviewing of good times make us feel? What about times that hurt? Does what we review in our minds impacts our mood and attitude?

Learning requires self-discipline to practice perseverance. To continue taking action when we don't feel like it will require self-denial and strength. As we persevere we can develop the skill of perseverance. We can gain experience into long-suffering to understand it. We can gain confidence and increase in faith. Our eyes can be opened through it.

When we first learn to ride a bike the experience can feel overwhelming. Many of us may even prefer training wheels, but training wheels will only teach us so much. Once we decide to try learning without the training wheels, we may quickly lose faith in our ability to ride it, because we don't know how - fear. Frustration and fear can develop. We might think to ourselves, "how the heck can I do this?" How we respond with our fear can be a game changer. Are we going to quit or keep practicing and learning. When things get confusing or difficult, are we going to continue to trust in God's ways or stay with our own understanding.

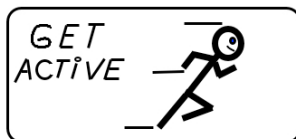
Now back to the bike. We soon see our friends riding their bikes telling us to keep trying - encouragement. There is something about seeing other people being successful that can inspire us to try - hope. So we try again. And as we keep trying we eventually get to peddle a little better (learning through experience) and stay on a little longer. Our little successes can provide hope, faith, encouragement, and confidence. And just like the success through perseverance in learning to ride a bike, so too our perseverance in learning to grow in God's character can provide us hope, faith, and confidence.

The Inward Authority process will require a continuous steady focus to incorporate within the mind, heart, and soul more accurately God's character. The figuring out how to practice more of God's character will need to happen. Like riding the bike, we can practice more patience, mercy, compassion, truth, forgiveness, justice, peace, and love. We practice it as the authors in the Bible suggest we should. As we learn through our trials, we can gain encouragement, hope, confidence, and faith.

Whether it's music, public speaking, surgery, sports, art, science, dance, math, or english, we know we need to take classes and learn how to do these things. We need to sit with an instructor and listen and complete the assignments. The more we regularly attend and complete the assignments the more we can learn and feel confident with the learning. If we skip the practices, attendance, and homework it will affect our understanding and we will feel less confident.

(Sometimes, students don't apply themselves and for different reasons. Some such reasons could be lack of faith, hope, interest, or comprehension of the topic. These are problems that can come up. We can discuss them with each other.)

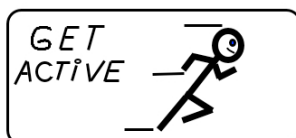
The ingredients in the growth formula work together in different measures. We are going to break down each ingredient separately knowing that they are never really working alone. All the ingredients of time, diligence, heart, mind, study, and spiritual focus work together all the time to affect our growth.



Read and discuss [Matthew 6:33](#). Why is Jesus saying this? How important is this? Read [1 Corinthians 13:1-3](#) and discuss how our faith would be without love.

If we study, but do not give attention to the senses of the heart, how can we learn about love or compassion? If we read aloud to others while thinking about other things, how well can we incorporate the information into our understanding? If we pray diligently with passion, but don't believe in it, how effective can the prayer be?

The path to growth involves new practices, change, and improved character. Our rate of growth will depend upon the investment of our: time, diligence, heart, thought, understanding bible content, and spiritual focus.



Read [Romans 5:1-5](#). Reflect, think about, and discuss how perseverance can produce character and hope. Share an experience where you have

persevered and the effect it had on character and hope.

Soul/time

The soul has to do with our living or being. What are we doing with our being. Are we being with God. We can review our schedule of activity. How much time we apply thinking and practicing God's goodness will impact how we grow. The options can vary from one minute a week to all day every day.

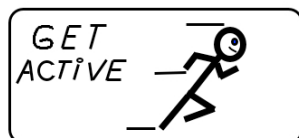
Our time invested has two parts, duration and frequency. Duration is how much time we remain a focused participant while frequency describes how often. We choose the duration and how often we are being with God.

We all have the same amount of time. We just choose to invest it differently. If we agree to obey God then we will learn how to do what God says. "I don't have time" is a response that could indicate we have other things more important than growing with God.

For now we ought to simply try to learn more about our choices and habits. Our schedules of activity will follow our choices and habits. Some of our habits operate at an unconscious level. Writing down all our activities can bring them more into our awareness. This is necessary in order to grow and make changes. To change means to be different. We will need to be different with our choices and actions with ones that can better align with the development of God's character.

Note: Time investment is one element still needing the others; thought, heart, diligence, Biblical study, and spiritual focus.

If John goes to church, serves as a greeter on Sundays, and runs a Bible study group on Wednesdays, then John could spend roughly 3 hours or so each week toward his growth.



Share with each other how spending time with God impacts your relationship with God. How much time do you spend with God? What have you done to improve your time with God?

How do we individually gauge what is an appropriate amount of time to invest in our growth with God? Well, this is going to vary by what we want or desire. If our goal is to maximize our personal potential to be with God then we ought to encourage ourselves toward our potential. Instead of the question: How much time should we invest? We can ask: How much time can we invest? It's an individual choice, not a mandate. It can't be done to check boxes. We will need to convince ourselves to passionately seek God with more time. This must not be done through beating ourselves up with shame or self-anger. Kicking ourselves within our minds to get going is a motivation brought by evil ways. Instead, we ought to develop some goal oriented encouragement; "I can do this," "focus on what's next," or "God, please help me listen to your direction." We can let go of the control and shift our attention to let God's love and grace help us.

As we evaluate ourselves we can ask questions: Is growing with God more important than our other activities? If God is going to be our greatest goal and teacher, then our schedule of activity can indicate that. We CAN do it, if we put in the time to learn through new practices of love, peace, mercy, forgiveness, truth, justice, and compassion.

The idea that this is impossible is a lie. People go through life changing events all the time where some adapt and some quit. We will need to choose whether to adapt and how much we will apply ourselves toward the formula. Champions learn to give their all. All, like the word "all" in the greatest commandment of God.

According to a 2017 cnbc article, Michael Phelps, a decorated Olympian was in the pool swimming "3 to 5 hours a day seven days a week."

<https://www.cnbc.com/2017/02/14/olympic-hero-michael-phelps-says-this-is-the-secret-to-his-success.html>

Jesus and the Apostles were every day seeking, praying, communing, discussing, teaching, and living to grow and be with God. We can do likewise. We can improve in the way we are with God everywhere we go within our minds and hearts and to any activity if we choose to do it. God is available everywhere all the time. God is convenient and always accessible, if we are humble and ready.

Growing with God means we will be increasing our time thinking, practicing, and participating in Godly character. The amount of time isn't

the goal. Increasing the time is the goal. For one person that could be 5 minutes a day and for another it could be an hour a day. It depends upon where a person is in their development.

It has been suggested and taught by many different people to practice daily prayer and meditation. There are books and Apps created with 30-day challenges. Our time with God can grow if we choose to do it.

Psalm 119, Acts 26:7, 1 Thessalonians 3:10, 2 Timothy 1:3, John 15

It's can be easy to dismiss our ability to increase with God. If we are going to grow with our faith and belief we will need to correct such thoughts.

Diligence

There are many words used to describe diligence. Below are some examples used in the Bible. Click the links below and read many verses to understand the patterns within them. The theme behind diligence exists throughout the Bible. The stories in the Bible can guide us into daily practices of trusting and relying upon God.

[Fervent](#)

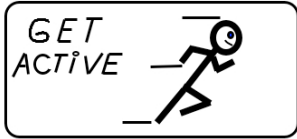
[Zeal](#)

[Effort](#)

[Bold](#)

[Stand Firm](#)

Our amount of effort, zeal, fervor, and diligence affects our faith whether it is minuscule or abundant. Some teachers may try to sway us away from measuring or quantifying our faith and efforts. Why would God command us to give our all without reason or purpose? There is a reason and the way to understand it is to do it. If we trust God more than anything else, why wouldn't we be growing in God's instructions?



2 Peter 3:14 Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless;

Be found in peace. Are we at peace within our minds, hearts, and souls? Does peace flow out from us? Are we without spot and blameless? Could we apply ourselves more to moving in that direction?

Luke 13:24 NIV Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.

Defining diligence:

to make haste, to give diligence

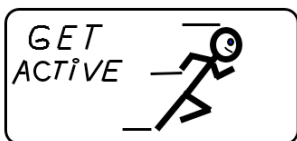
<https://biblehub.com/greek/4704.htm>

Diligence “steady, earnest, and energetic effort: persevering application”

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/diligence>

Perhaps the great commandment of God uses the word ‘all’ to describe what sort of effort or strength we are to apply. And perhaps it is used three times for clarity so we don’t miss it. As we invest our time growing we will need to also invest our ‘all.’ The elements work together.

As mentioned in the last talk on the element of ‘Time’ Michael Phelps spent hours in the pool every day. If Michael Phelps got in the pool and just sat at the stairs he would have little growth, training, or strengthening. He would prune up for no reason. Yet he could still boast about being in the pool for three hours a day seven days a week.



What is it like to show up for a group or lesson with little focus or attention? How would such behavior affect learning? Is just showing up good enough for continued spiritual growth?

How well we apply ourselves with our time affects our rate of growth. Please keep in mind that in many cases beginning attendance requires more effort than continued attendance. Once we have adapted to an

action, it will often require less effort to repeat it, so we can add something new to our efforts toward growth.

Mark 12:41 - 44 **NIV** Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”

Jesus is describing how the woman gave more, but she didn't, if we are only looking at the money. Jesus is not passing judgement based upon the amount of the money. Jesus is judging by the effort, heart, mind, and faith. The giving Jesus is interested in is not material, but spiritual. How much we are willing to give from our being or soul is what is important. (See John 15)

Romans 12:11 not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord

Click and read the concordance searches below.

(When reading scripture we ought to apply it inwardly into our being. We ought to make it part of what we think, sense, and who we are becoming.)

NKJV “[diligent](#)”

NIV “[effort](#)”

Romans 14:19 NIV Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

The Bible is calling us toward inward action and effort that could seem demanding or even impossible. Most of us can improve our diligence. What is extremely important, if we choose to grow with God, is to challenge ourselves toward our own potential to see how much we can indeed grow with God. Most of us are capable of improving with love, peace, patience, gentleness, compassion, mercy, and forgiveness.

To grow further, faster, harder, deeper, longer, often requires more effort, commitment, participation, energy, focus, and time. Such things can lead toward growth.

It is by doing that we learn what we can accomplish through our renewed efforts. It is through our growing that we can learn what we can do through faith in God's character and principles. If we convince ourselves away from striving toward God, we can miss the amazing grace God continues to offer us.

The accepting of the process and choosing to act with it has always been the sticking point. To accept the process we will need to accept the struggle, endurance, and perseverance. Like a runner has to face exhaustion we too will face part of ourselves wanting to stop or delay. To grow we will need to continue to raise the bar and go the extra distance within our mind, heart, soul, and strength.

Each day we can evaluate ourselves for our diligence. Are we challenging ourselves to grow? Are we accepting the struggle? Are we persevering? Are we doing something more or different this week?

Below is an example of gauging our diligence.

Continuum scale of diligence

1 - - - - - 5 - - - - - 10

Our weakest
capable effort

Our mid-range
(normal) effort

Our maximum
capable effort

It may be tempting to assess others with this scale, but assessing others can often distract us from looking at ourselves. Looking more at how we can improve our own application to the formula can help us grow.

Prayer to God for help to improve our own diligence is often needed. The best prayers can be asking for help and direction. Starting the day, humbling ourselves, and praying for help can be the best way to begin. Then we can listen, persevere, and apply ourselves more vigorously to experience and learn what God's character can teach us.

Heart

The 'heart' is emphasized heavily in the Bible. We must pay close attention to it daily. Without, we are spiritually lost. Read through the filtered concordance search from the site www.inwardauthority.com [Heart](#)

biblehub.com defines the Hebrew meaning of heart as:

"inner man, mind, will, heart"

<https://biblehub.com/hebrew/3820.htm>

In the greatest commandment Moses did not use the word mind because the Hebrew meaning of heart includes the mind. So in the old testament when the word heart is used, it is likely applying to the mind and feelings.

biblehub.com adds this description to the greek version or New Testament use of heart - "desire-producer that makes us tick" (G. Archer), i.e our "desire-decisions" that establish who we really are"

<https://biblehub.com/greek/2588.htm>

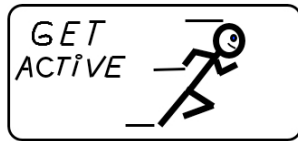
Inspiration is to bring about desire. Getting inspired can be a powerful experience. Desire and passion can motivate us toward action. We can have desire for love and peace or anger and fear. We can have desire for mercy or for money. We can have desire for God's ways and righteousness or for selfish ambition. We can desire sex, drugs, approval, vanity, and many other ungodly things. Stories in the Bible describe the way with God involves desiring God and God's ways. We ought to grow our desire toward truth, justice, humility, love, and peace.

What we desire is contingent upon our understanding and choices. We cannot desire something we do not know exists. We have to first know about it in order to desire it.

Our desires can change through new learning and experience. An addict has intense desires for things in destructive ways. Those who recover can learn to desire new things through new experiences and learning. The change often comes through a program of new action.

Grace, the spiritual element that feeds our soul, has power to awaken our spiritual understanding. Grace is what our soul desires and when we taste

it we realize how much we need and want it. As we receive and accept God's grace into our hearts we can receive with it new experiences and learning. We can taste the good of God and come to desire it more. (Psalm 34:8)



Think about a time when someone helped you. How did that impact you? Now think of a time when you were there for someone else. How did that impact you? When we give to each other and receive from each other God's goodness, desire for God is often increased.

As desires come we can discern our choices to ensure they agree with God's goodness. Seeing correctly enables us to act correctly. We may not be able to change all of our desire to be exactly like God, but we can surely make improvements one desire at a time. Discernment will be needed to help us stand firm and continue to improve with God.

Colossians 3:1 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Desire is used 190 times in NKJV

Desire for material over the spiritual. We ought to know what we love. Do we love our 'stuff' or the Holy Spirit of God within us? What motivates us more, money or peace? Our desires can illuminate errors within our faith or belief. Our understanding may need adjustments. Taking action with God's goodness can help, if we choose to let it become part of who we are. (1 Timothy 6:10, 2 Timothy 3:2, Luke 16:14)

Mark 12:38 Then He said to them in His teaching, "Beware of the scribes, who **desire** to go around in long robes, *love* greetings in the marketplaces,

What we desire and love matters.

Read John 8:37-47,

Heart - If you abide in Me

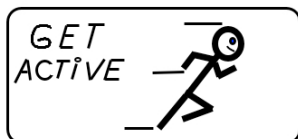
John 15:7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you **desire**, and it shall be done for you.

The word 'if' is a crucial piece of information that can often be overlooked. It means there is a condition involved. There are many areas in the Bible that uses this clause. (Acts 8:37, John 8:42, John 14:15, Mathew 19:17, Romans 8:9, 10:9, 11:21-23 13:4, 1 Corinthians 3:17, 8:3,)

See also - [Unless](#), [Those who](#),

Every word of John 15 works together to describe how Jesus wants our whole being to respond. Jesus not only lays out the good that can come from applying our whole Inward Authority to be with God, but also says we can be "cast out."

John 15:6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned.



Think of a time when you were hurt by what someone else did. How did that impact you? Now think of a time someone else was hurt by what you did. How did that impact you? Did this affect faith, trust, confidence, or compassion? How we respond matters. Experience can affect our desire.

God wants us to know we can hurt through our selfish ambitions and ungodly pursuits, but more importantly God wants us to keep our minds and hearts focused on seeing how our alignment and practices with God's ways produce healing, restoration, freedom, and joy. So let's not get stuck on the negative consequences, but just be aware they exist. Our motivation is to pursue good, not fear evil. We "cling to what is good."
Romans 12:9

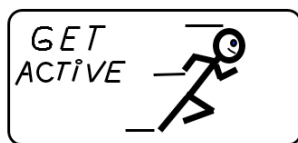
Heart - Desire humility

Psalms 37:4 Delight yourself also in the Lord, And He shall give you the **desires** of your heart.

If we can delight ourselves in God's ways, purpose, righteousness, and grace, then our heart will be set upon God's goodness. So then, God will give us the desires of our hearts . . . God's grace.

Matthew 16:24 - 25 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

Matthew 20:26 - 28 Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."



Share about a time when you were full of desire for God? Where were you and what were you doing? Were you attentive to God? Think about a time when you were far from God. Where were you and what were you doing?

Our desire can be transformed if we are willing to take the action and accept the transformation into our hearts and minds. We must accept the good in love, peace, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, mercy, truth, justice, and generosity to be our goal. We must experience these more and more to taste the good of God and grow in understanding.

Heart - It comes and goes

The fire inside to grow with God can burn out. Inspiration can slip away. Mistakes, disbelief, and fear can develop. After coming home from a spiritual retreat it can often be the case that we lose the sense of a powerful spiritual experience. As our minds and hearts shift away from God in our activities our spiritual experiences can decrease.

Sometimes we will need to invest the time and effort without the inspiration. If we stay with the time, effort, and thought toward God, the inspiration can come back. The heart, although a fundamental ingredient, is not the leading component. Our feelings and experiences largely result

from our choices and perceptions. It takes time and regular practice with introspective analysis to see why we do what we do which brings the feelings we experience.

Many of us may not be able to perceive our thoughts and mental condition which create our inward ambiance that largely affects our emotional state. For now, let's just understand that our perceptions greatly impact our faith which brings forth resulting feelings.

It is important to understand there are many areas of our perceptions which we have little control or influence especially over immediate change. But we can choose to set aside our perceptions that interfere with following God and instead choose to believe God's ways. We can choose to disregard what we think and follow God more. We can die to self and do more of what Jesus taught us to do.

Many of us who can mostly only sense what we feel can be lead by our feelings. We may be choosing actions to help our emotional state. We may avoid actions because we 'don't feel like it.' Such behavior can be emotionally lead behavior. Imagine if we only went to work or school because we felt like it. We will seldom achieve goals if we become lead by our feelings. Feelings are powerful and an essential element, but they are not the leading determinate factor to pursue God.

We ought to pursue God because we believe God is the most important thing in our lives. God is the solution to all things good. Living for God is right, correct, and the path to freedom, peace, love, and joy. When we are down, tired, stressed, busy, etc. we are to seek God and do God's will. We are to serve God. God wants us to stand firm with God's ways even when we do not desire it. Our faith may need to be stronger and longer than our passion.

Realistically, it may be best to simply and practically understand our growth with God is to be gradual and progressive. We will not all of a sudden become perfectly patient, loving, and just forever. We will likely have good days and not so good days. Yet we will need to practice throughout our lives returning to trust God more than our feelings.

If our desire for God leaves and we then choose to stop pursuing God, our choice, not staying with God, can rob us of the opportunity to receive

more grace. Isn't God's grace worth obeying God even when we don't want to?

James 1:14 - 15 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

James writes, "drawn away by his own desires." We get the desires and as we get the desires we have a choice of whether to correct our thinking or continue thinking about evil desires. If we continue thinking about evil desires and play them out in our minds we will be giving ourselves over to them that can bring forth death.

The heart has desires, but the mind can choose to focus upon God to move us toward God's desires. We can increase awareness into our thinking through disciplined practices, increase discernment, and gradually improve the skill of redirecting our thoughts.

Proverbs 23:19 Listen, my son, and be wise, and set your heart on the right path:

In the next talk about the mind we will discuss how to practice 2 Corinthians 10:5.

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,

Mind

The formula is based upon the command of God to love God with all of who we are. This means being increasingly more active within our thoughts, choices, and actions upon God's character. Why? Because we love God.

Learning with God

In order for us to fully learn the meaning and purpose of God's instructions we will need to do them. Before we get more into that let's first agree upon some basic points.

Let's begin with agreeing upon some facts about learning:

1. Learning begins with simple understanding and can gradually grow as it continues to add understanding. Math for example: we first learn addition, then subtraction, then multiplication and build from there. We cannot skip this learning and jump into calculus.
2. Learning to grow with God must begin with our understanding of God's ways. We need to practice God's ways within our being before moving on from there. Merely reading and talking is insufficient to build spiritual understanding just as talking about math without practice is insufficient.
3. The Bible has a consistent message of a program of action for those who want to be saved from wrath. Learn to love and obey God.
4. Salvation is contingent upon grace which is accessed through faith in God and God's ways.
5. Faith has to do with belief which comes from our perception and understanding. Our ability of discernment impacts our faith. How we interpret the instructions and apply them also impacts our faith.
6. God wants us to improve our faith with love. To know God, we must know love through experience. (1 John 4:7 - 8)
7. The first and most important instruction to grow with God is to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength.
8. Few people will pursue learning on their own without incentives from money or community. (Spiritual growth will be self - driven)
9. Discipline, consistency, repetition, investigation, and doing more than the crowd (mainstream) is often required.
10. A decision and commitment is needed to grow with accountability and self evaluation to ensure growth is taking place. (Schools measure growth and learning, even seminary schools that educate pastors to teach and guide churches)

Most of us have picked up habits from our parents or those we grew up with. We may have picked some things up from friends. We can also pick up many mannerisms from our culture or subculture. Yet as we change environments we will often need to adjust to the new environments.

The mind will seek to do what it has been trained to do. For the most part it follows a program it already understands. The way we talk, walk, laugh, joke, and dress are ways we have learned. We didn't come out of the womb talking and walking. We had to struggle and learn.

God is about peace, love, mercy, etc. and we are to seek to develop such character within our mind, heart, attitudes, and actions.

We each face uncontrollable influences upon our development. Painful things happen in our lives that can influence us mentally and emotionally. But we choose how to adapt to those influences. Keeping our trust in God is key. We learn how to deal with difficulties and limitations.

Becoming part of spiritual communities can involve many such adjustments. How we pray, worship, and talk about God can change from one place to the next. How we dress, sing, and what we read can be different. We must be sure whatever our adjustments we make is in large part agreeing with God's ways, purpose, righteousness, goodness, and grace. We will discuss this deeper in the next talk about adjusting to Biblical instructions.

It's crucial to get it into our beliefs and understanding that our minds have habits and thinking behavior that is ungodly. If we think to ourselves, "I'm fine," then we may not seek to improve. If we are not improving with God, then would we really be following God? Isn't following God moving in the direction of God?

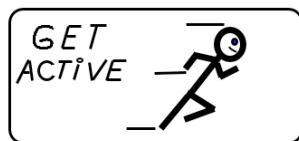
Improving our critical thinking is needed in order for us to learn to see truth outside of our understanding. We need to question our assumptions. To take a more objective view we will need to practice questioning our own beliefs and thoughts. This can be uncomfortable, but to renew our minds we will need to think differently.

Romans 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

So the renewing of our mind with God will prove God's will.

It may be best to choose settings that provide Godly good information. Are we situating ourselves to absorb spiritual truth that challenges us to grow in our attitudes and actions? How much time do we spend in places where spiritual growth is demonstrated? Are we in groups long enough to see it?

The mind learns systematically through a process. The stories in the Bible indicate an understanding of this process. Jesus sends the disciples, but not before undergoing much training. If the disciples lived with Jesus, that would be the most intense training. And this is the example of how Jesus followers ought to train.



Do we give ourselves over each day to apply our "all" toward being with God? What rationale do we use to excuse ourselves from undergoing such training? Do we believe it's possible with God? Would it be easier if we knew someone that did it?

In order to learn new things we need to get our minds spending time doing things differently than we are used to doing. And it needs to be frequent. God wants us thinking about God's ways all the time. Taking a few minutes at the beginning, mid-point, and end of each day to simply consider God's character and how we can partake in it can help us grow. God is worth a few minutes of our thoughts, focus, and effort, each day, right?

2 Timothy 1:7 For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

Experience is the goal

In Luke 10:25 - 37 Jesus explains to an "expert in the law" how to inherit eternal life. This is where Jesus explains the first or great commandment of God. But the man wanted more information about who a neighbor is and Jesus gave the parable of the good samaritan. Jesus finishes the parable with the instruction "Go and do likewise."

In the parable, the neighbor wasn't someone who lived next door.

Jesus was all about guiding people into Godly living. What we believe and do teaches and builds us both inwardly and outwardly.

There is system used by many schools to help develop curriculum to guide students into deeper understanding and knowledge.

“widely accepted in the education system in the United States.”https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cognitive_rigor

The systems guide students slowly into experience and practice. Explaining how things work involves a deeper level of understanding. We ought to grow with God in ways where we can explain our experiences of righteousness and grace. If we cannot explain it then we simply are not at that level of development yet.

If we obey Jesus, “Go and do likewise,” then we will gain information to help us explain what it is like to love our neighbor. If we don't, then we will miss out on such education.

Corruptive thinking behavior

Fear, worry, anxiousness, and hurried thoughts are destructive. Thinking to ourselves with fear about deadlines or missing out is missing out on spiritual correction. God is peace and love, therefore our thoughts ought to move toward these ideas. This takes discipline, repeated practice, and time. Much of our thinking behavior is so ingrained making corrections can be like unwinding a tangled string. It requires patience and perseverance.

Thoughts about indifference, resentment, and how we were wronged can develop bitterness and anger. We can take action to protect ourselves from wrongs and ought to think about such things, but replaying past hurts over and over in our minds without a solution can be destructive.

There is a big difference between healthy shame and self-condemnation. We ought to be shifting our thoughts toward seeing how we can forgive, speak the truth, be just, and show mercy. There is a balance with being

safe and giving. We ought to investigate, collaborate, and learn these things. (See [Colossians 3:12-17 Character of the new man](#))

A great daily study could be Matthew 5-7 with putting into practice what it says.

We can purify our hearts and cleanse our conscience through the practice of prayer to better do God's will, self-examination, confession, service, making right wrongs done to others, and sharing our spiritual experience. This process has saved many souls. It works, for those who work it. But many will not, because the mind can be very difficult to convince.

We can grow with God, if we accept God into our hearts and minds. We can know God, if we seek and do God's will.

2 Corinthians 4:16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward *man* is being renewed day by day.

We forget

We become sharp at what we currently practice and learn. Experiencing love and peace one week will not guarantee it carry over into the next week. We need to continue doing it. We need to continue to practice humility and compassion. We need to keep the truth with justice in our hearts and minds. If we stop, take a break, or delay then we begin separating ourselves from God. God is an experience we are to live inwardly every day in our attitudes and choices.

We are influenced

Magicians and con artists know how to mislead our thinking. Our minds have many weak spots that can be easily influence toward ungodly choices. There are many examples of this. Learned Helplessness, Conformity, Cognitive Bias, Phantom Limb, Mandella Effect, and more.

We ought to continue focusing our awareness upon growing in God's goodness adapting and making changes increasing our likeness with God. The next discussion will be on the growth formula element of adjusting to Bible content. Remember, all the elements work together.

Adjusting to Bible instructions

As soon as man was created, God gave Adam instructions. Adam eventually went against God's instructions. Adam ate the forbidden fruit and liked it. He liked it because it tasted good. Yet he felt shame. And there lies the dichotomy of evil, first enjoyable and later shameful. If only we felt shame first because the human mind is so short-sighted.

Moses was a man who served God well. Moses became God's teacher and created instructions. The instructions were pretty clear, but people struggled to carry them out. What usually happens when people are given instructions is they look around them at how others respond to the instructions and do what they see other people doing. Moses tried to point God's people to focus strongly on God's instructions within them, instead of following people.

Deuteronomy 6:6 NKJV And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart.

Deuteronomy 30:14 But the word *is* very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it.

Moses is pointing at our inward authority. Within us all lies instructions from God, if we listen. We have spiritual senses available to us that can help guide our steps, but we must pay attention in order to sense it. Those who have ears to hear, let them hear.

Romans 10:8 But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach):

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

These character traits are available to taste and understand if we set our hearts and minds to participate in them. God's instructions guide us toward tasting spiritual goodness to help us come to our spiritual senses.

When we first learn to ride a bike someone gives us some basic instructions to get on it, hold the handles, peddle, etc. We still do not understand what we are doing, but we go and try. Then we fall and complain. We become afraid, challenged, or frustrated. The instructions were to guide us into action where we could learn what is unexplainable. Words are insufficient to explain how to ride a bike. We need to figure it out on our own.

Once we figure it out we follow our senses to navigate our riding. We gain a new understanding. We are no longer listening or giving attention to other's instructions because inwardly we know what to do. If we listen to others and go with their instructions we would probably crash. Reactions are needed to happen immediately. We each have our own unique perspective of the rider for our journey and are responsible for our choices.

To further develop our ability to ride the bike (live by the spirit) is continued practice. We can still learn from others who have ridden their bikes down paths we have yet to go. Yet we each ride our bikes according to the way we have learned.

Following God is about developing spiritual senses which we will get into more in the Formula element of Spiritual Focus. For now, we need to understand some basic instructions knowing that our journey with them can provide improved spiritual understanding.

The instructions lead us into sincere truth, love, & peace

2 Thessalonians 2:10 and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

1 Peter 1:22 Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart,

1 Timothy 1:5 Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith,

As with the bike example of learning with senses, once we practice sincere truth in love for a while we can develop a sense of how to do it better. We can sense how it impacts our spiritual walk and connection with others. We may face confusion, fear, worry, and frustration because it is so different. But that's the point, we need to be different, Godly different. We will need to persevere through such experiences. This struggle is part of the development if we persevere and continue faithfully.

We can learn best through collaboration from others to learn to see how we can grow in sincerity. We ought to evaluate our progress with our sincere truth in love and see that it agrees with how love is defined in 1 Corinthians 13. We ought to make continued corrections, gradually over time, and learn through the process of adapting and adjusting to such Biblical instruction.

Like the bike metaphor, hearing the instructions will not be sufficient. We will need to do it and learn through trial and error. As we do it, we will learn many uncomfortable truths about ourselves which can be corrected through our accepting God's ways into our hearts, minds, attitudes, and actions.

Adjusting to disapproval from others

Matthew 10:35 For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'

Since many people follow the pattern of the world, what they see other people doing, they can have trouble accepting others who are not 'fitting in.'

That said, the few who choose to live right with God will not be well accepted by the many who follow the pattern of the world. Few will honestly look at themselves to see how they can be corrected by God's ways and accept God's corrective truth.

1 Peter 3:14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. "And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled."

Demonstrating sincere love, truth, mercy, compassion, patience, justice, in a society that is dishonest, uncaring, self-seeking, exploiting, lustful, biased, hurried, anxious, angry, and fearful will indeed experience much resistance, disinterest, and aggression.

One natural response when others attack is to raise our defenses. Learning how to respond in a way that is loving, truthful, patient, and safe takes a lot of figuring out, practice, and time.

The command is to love God with all our heart, all our mind, all our soul, and all our strength. This means anyone who worships God the way God instructs will be giving their all.

John 4:24 God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Our outward actions vary in how we follow the Holy Spirit of God. Merely singing, raising hands, etc. does not define whether we are worshipping God as God instructs. It is the condition we are experiencing within us that defines whether we are worshipping God. Our outward display ought to be consistent with God’s character of patience, peace, truth, and the like. If we are indifferent, self-seeking, unloving, etc. then how could we be loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. Instead, we would be loving our own ideas of how things should be or trying to fit in with others around us doing what we see them doing.

Adjusting to a new identity

What does it mean to give our all? Our all is an individual experience that can only truly be understood by the individual and God. Our all means we become dedicated and committed to give everything we have to improve our inner being toward God’s purpose, ways, goodness, righteousness, and grace. Our hearts and minds are to renew into Christ likeness.

Colossians 3:8-10 But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him,

Our image is to be shaped into being more like God's. Yet the shape of our inward hearts and minds will be contingent upon the giving of ourselves over to God's ways, purpose, and character.

Perhaps the most important instruction could be to humble ourselves and make God's character more important than anything else in our lives.

Romans 12:16 NKJV Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.

James 4:6 NKJV But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."

Matthew 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

Luke 9:23 Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.

There are many verses and chapters in the Bible that point to the idea of denying self and making God our main focus. It is so crucial we begin programming our minds to accept these instructions as written, not as other people define them. We ought to improve our alignment with them within our hearts, minds, attitudes, and actions.

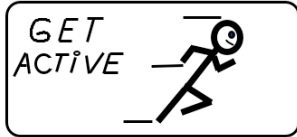
We do it because the Bible is correct. We seek it out because it our purpose. We obey it because it is the solution to all things. But again, we follow what we see written, not what another man interprets. We use others around us to help us interpret it correctly, because we make mistakes.

Let's keep in mind anyone can choose to live by God's word every day. We just need to deny thoughts that urge us away from doing it. We can't understand 'why' until we do it. Living by God's instructions will be different.

Living by God's instructions is an imperfect process that can develop us more toward what is perfect. We are imperfect and will always have imperfections within us, but as we let go of our ideas and accept God's

character into our being we can become more perfected. Accepting grace into our being can purify our hearts and cleanse our conscience. Joy, love, and peace can abound.

Read Ephesians 6:10 - 18 Armor of God



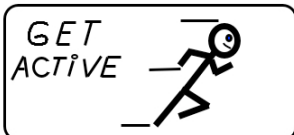
Are we putting on the ‘whole armor of God?’ Are we actively participating in the spiritual battle? Think about or discuss how we can improve today to stand firm and be ready with God. How can we strengthen in sincere truth, love, and peace?

1 Peter 5:5 Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.”

There exists within many of us an attitude of reciprocation. If someone is mean to us, then we are mean to them or at least will not seek them out. If someone is kind to us than we will more likely be kind to them and be more inviting to them than others who have been mean to us. (See [Social Exchange Theory](#))

Jesus gave instructions for us to not live by this attitude. If God is about love and peace then we are to live by God’s standards and see how we can grow love and peace, even with others who may be challenging. We can correct thoughts within our minds that prompt us to retaliate, belittle, blame, or argue. (Good instructions - Matthew 5 - 7)

We choose what to watch, read, listen to, and groups to attend to help us learn and grow.



Just like choosing the best school to learn we can choose the best places to encourage and help us experience the development of God’s grace. Are the groups we attend shaping us into Christ likeness? If so, how? Does our daily activity develop us more into Christ-likeness? If so, how? Are there other ways that could help us grow?

1 Corinthians 15:33-34 Do not be deceived: “Evil company corrupts good habits. Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak *this* to your shame.”

Information and thoughts need to be brought into our consciousness. In order to have God within our minds we need to set our minds upon God. We can at least set ourselves up with a structure that facilitates such thinking. We can have groups designed to bring our attention toward how we are developing into God’s character. ([Click here for an example of how to set up a group](#))

We all have a sense of what is normal. Our normal is different than others. Our normal could be corruption to God’s normal. Some of us may be tempted to rationalize or explain how our normal is okay. Such thinking does not line up with the instructions in the Bible. We can compare and contrast our thoughts and actions with Biblical instructions of how we ought to think and behave and see how we can make changes to improve. If our normal doesn’t change then we don’t change.

Remember, the journey isn’t about being perfect, its about moving in the direction of perfection. If we aren’t moving or growing in God’s ways, then we may not be seeking to grow. Ignoring our response to grow with God could be condoning spiritual loss to our souls.

If we come up with a reason not to improve our growth with God, we can share our reason with God. We can go to the stories in the Bible and compare our reasoning with such stories. Is that reasoning acceptable to God? Or are we putting God off?

All our beliefs and perceptions do not match God’s intentions for us. If they did, then, we would be like Christ. That said, we each have much correction we can make within our perceptions, beliefs, and faith. If we are unwilling to make correction, then we ought to evaluate why. Right now our minds are governed by some beliefs that are at odds with God’s ways. We are simply fallible people seeking to improve. Humbling of ourselves will be required to accept our imperfections and new direction.

Resistance isn’t wrong, it’s normal. We all have a rebellious way within us that can resist change. Ask any trainer and they can testify with experience how few people really give themselves over entirely to the process to be

changed. It's normal to not feel like changing and to make mistakes. It's normal and not evil. We all fall short of perfection and we always will. Yet we can grow at a rate where we can improve our spiritual productivity. The goal is not perfection, but improved participation in Spiritual character.

Let's stick with the best material, the Bible. To best align ourselves with the Word of God is to make the Word of God our instruction. That means we read the Bible more than any other book because it is more important than any other book. Our minds can be like a sponge that absorbs and retains information. It soaks up the information that is around us. The information within the sponge often directs our lives. If the sponge becomes filled with conflicting dogma it can affect our choices, actions, feelings, and relationships.

It may be best to define Biblical ideas and principles by reading the Bible. Is our opinion and understanding about God or the Bible based upon what we have read in it, or is it based upon someone else's information? If we go to some other author or speaker for their input without looking at the primary source we can easily develop an understanding that is incorrect. Being more correct with God has everything to do with our goal. The Bible really hammers out this point.

To learn about Biblical terms we can do concordance searches within the Bible about that word to see the pattern of how it is used.

We will need to learn critical thinking skills and self-evaluation to see if our thoughts are right. We will need a sense of humility and willingness to be corrected. 2 Corinthians 10:5 "bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

Let us hope together for more Christians to move into corrective Biblical action and learn God's message through new experiences.

Spiritual focus

Through decades of experience I have consistently found that whenever I am afraid, worried, anxious, or angry, I have found my thinking to be away from God and focused more on my own wants. My thoughts can be directed into entitlements, unmet expectations, and what I believe I deserve. And when I think about God and the spiritual path I realize how I

had forgotten to walk in it. God offers grace, but each day I need to choose to be in it.

1 Peter 4:10 As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

Because what is spiritual can be understood in many different ways we will use Bible verses to point out patterns. There are particular instructions for us on how to live by the spirit and with the spirit. Since the Bible presents much instruction we ought to understand the instruction and reflect upon how we can carry it out to understand it more. Before we can carry anything out, we will need to focus our heart, mind, soul, and strength toward it.

We can access the Spirit

2 Corinthians 3:17 Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord *is*, there *is* liberty.

Luke 11:13 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”

John 14:26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. (See also John 16:13, Acts 1:8, 2:17,)

Romans 14:17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

2 Corinthians 5:5 Now He who has prepared us for this very thing *is* God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

If we are out of touch with the Spirit, it's not because of God, it's because of our own attitude and choices. God doesn't change, we do. And we are invited to change our heart, mind, soul, and strength to be with God and continue to grow our spiritual focus.

Spiritual battle

Ephesians 4:29 Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.

Matthew 26:41 Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak.”

We have a willing spirit within us to guide and help us. The spirit is ready to assist. The spirit will not act for us. We need to listen and respond with spiritual thoughts and actions.

John 3:6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

What we are born of is what we choose to obey and follow. What we obey and follow is from what we are born. We can only have one master and one God. By our fruit and our deeds we can understand what we follow.

Matthew 7:20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

John 6:63 It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and *they* are life.

Sincerity is a requirement. We must sincerely desire to grow. We can focus upon spiritual things lacking sincerity. We can speak spiritual words lacking sincerity. There may be underlying spiritual struggles blocking our sincere love for God. Fear, resentment, vanity, and deception exists. We can humble ourselves to God, praying for willingness to let it go and pursue other spiritual good within our minds, hearts, and souls.

Our words develop from the attitude of our hearts and minds. Sincere words that come from love and seek peace can promote spiritual good things. Words that promote worldly, superficial, and material things are likely unspiritual. Discernment with the spirit will be required to maintain spiritual good action.

1 Corinthians 2:12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

1 Corinthians 6:17 But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit *with Him*.

If our thoughts, attitudes, feelings, and actions align with God's purpose and grace, then we are more likely joined spiritually with God. God is love. If we can seek to imagine and experience God's love, we can position ourselves better to experience God. Yet it is the collective character of God working together within us that can enhance our experience with God. Love works with mercy, forgiveness, peace, truth, justice, generosity, kindness, and patience.

Galatians 5:22 - 26 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those *who are* Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

"If we live in the Spirit" then we walk in the Spirit and will produce the fruit described above. Those closest to us can more accurately attest to our productivity with the love, joy, peace, etc. if we live in the Spirit. It can be a good evaluation to ask those closest to us how we can grow in the character described above.

Our attitudes, thoughts, and desires to lift ourselves up above others are not with the Spirit. Our vain conceit and wanting to be better than others is destructive toward spiritual good. We ought to deny such thoughts and prompts while focusing more intentionally with long-suffering to humbly bring into focus the good fruit of the Spirit we can produce and experience.

Ephesians 5:8 - 11 For you were once darkness, but now *you are* light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit *is* in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose *them*.

"Unfruitful works of darkness" could be anything not matching the description of the fruit of the Spirit. If we are not producing fruit, then we may become unfruitful.

Philippians 2:1 - 4 Therefore if *there is* any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind. *Let nothing be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

The Spirit will guide us increasingly toward serving and helping others toward spiritual good. Our thoughts, words, and senses can grow more and more into spiritual productivity, if we choose to focus upon and obey the Holy Spirit within us.

Repentance

1 Samuel 10:6 Then the Spirit of the Lord will come upon you, and you will prophesy with them and be turned into another man.

Proverbs 1:23 Turn at my rebuke; Surely I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you.

Temptations, distractions, misleading messages, misunderstandings, desires of the flesh, and weaknesses of the mind can prompt us toward unspiritual things. We all have them. Most of us from time to time will give into temptation. How much and how far we give into temptation can vary from situation to situation. God will always be available to us for healing and help when we are humble enough, willing, ready to accept it.

Acts 2:38 Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Repent is to turn to God. We are not turning away from Sin, because if we were we would be giving attention to Sin. If we turn away from Sin, Sin is the topic. Instead we turn toward God, because God is the topic. God is the focus. Good is the focus. Our spiritual focus needs to be upon God for good to come. If we constantly set our minds upon evil in Sin to abstain from it we will be observing evil instead of good. This can bring about fear. Yet, since we are focused upon God and Godly good we can set our thoughts upon the good of God and can bring it about in our words,

attitudes, and actions. We can reflect upon beauty, joy, love, and peace. As we observe such things within our minds and experience them more within our hearts we may experience and witness them grow.

Romans 2:29 but *he is* a Jew who *is one* inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise *is not* from men but from God.

Inwardly we are to be with the Spirit. We are to think and behave in ways to seek praise more from God than from people. We follow first the Spirit within us than the written words in the Bible. We see how they work together. Spiritual truth and the word of God work together.

Romans 8:1 *There is* therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

Romans 8:6 For to be carnally minded *is* death, but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace. (see all of Romans 8)

What our minds spend time thinking about affects our spiritual productivity.

1 Corinthians 7:34 There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world—how she may please *her* husband.

It's not being a virgin that is the focus of spiritual significance in this verse. What is of spiritual significance is what the virgin is focused upon doing "cares about the things of the Lord" rather than, "cares about the things of the world" and how to please people.

2 Corinthians 7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

To cleanse ourselves from filth is to perfect holiness in reverence to God. We will no longer need to fear God once we experience God's good. We can learn through experience how right, good, pure, loving, and joyful God

is. We can then be more encouraged to seek it out with hope and faith. What we find joy and fulfillment in is often what we gravitate towards. We can learn to think about and understand through experience how following God can produce much fulfillment and joy.

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Once we understand through experience God's amazing grace and the good we have access to, the words in the Bible directing us into self-denial and helping others will prompt us toward self-sacrifice that can feel like spiritual surgery. Parts of our beliefs can be tied to sin unwilling to let it go. Our focus to increase ourselves into grace can sometimes be like cutting the chains of sin holding us back. Sin, that we have come to rely upon will seek to continue and we will need to take captive our thoughts which prompt us to it and replace those thoughts with prompts toward God's righteousness. An addict of any sort will face intense discomfort in recovery. This too with simpler forms of spiritual growth.

1 John 4:6 We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

Only when we accept God's ways into our minds and hearts can we hear with clarity God's spirit. As long as we are at odds with truth, peace, forgiveness, mercy, and justice or clinging to evil from fear, resentment, or vain conceit, we can be blind and deaf to God's instruction.

1 John 4:18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.

Philippians 4:8-9 NKJV Meditate on These Things

“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things which you

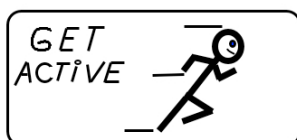
learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.”

We are to live with God in our minds, hearts, attitudes, and actions. The Biblical instructions indicate this is to be done regularly, not just once in a while. The spiritual reality around us lives and breaths within the underlying dynamics of love. Love is the central ingredient and [1 Corinthians 13](#) gives a pretty good definition of love.

We ought to be looking intently at bringing to life such character. Meditation can be a great way to imagine this character, how we can demonstrate it with our words, our pace, our posture, our presentation, our choices, and attitude. We can seek with empathy to understand how other people feel, their perceptions, and care for them. We can learn to be with other people spiritually, emotionally, and affectionately. God has everything to do with feelings and spiritual sensations which involve our whole being/soul.

Varieties & differences

We each have different spiritual strengths and weaknesses. We can recognize the spiritual strengths within each other and affirm it while also encouraging growth. As we encourage others we ought to first ensure we are doing it with patient kindness, sincere truth, and love. We also ought to listen patiently for feedback giving attention to spiritual truth presented both verbally and non-verbally. We can learn a lot by our own inward reactions to such exchanges.



Are we okay with hearing how we can improve? Are we okay with receiving critical feedback from others? Can we understand how critical feedback can help us see how to improve?

1 Corinthians 12:4 - 7 There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit *of all*:

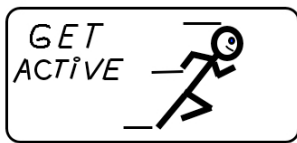
We can learn from each other's different views and insights. For every character trait there are both strengths and weaknesses. Let's focus upon

seeing how we can learn from others strengths and improving our own weaknesses with God's character.

Spiritual family

Mark 3:33 - 35 But He answered them, saying, "Who is My mother, or My brothers?" And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother."

We will need to discern carefully our associations, while always seeking first to correct ourselves into God's grace. Jesus is making an important point in this verse "For whoever does the will of God."
(Also see Ezekiel 18 & John 15)



Are we around others who do the will of God? Do others we are around encourage and challenge us to grow with God? Are we encouraging others to grow with God? If yes, how so?

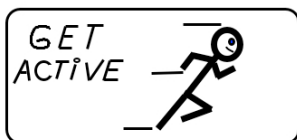
We ought to choose to speak and demonstrate spiritual good each day.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."

(Jesus explains this command to be the first and most important. Are we going to prioritize this command as Jesus instructed? Our answer will be stated through our actions. Below are more instructions from Moses.)

Deuteronomy 6:6-9 "Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates."



Is this instruction obsolete or now unnecessary? How well are we fulfilling the command? Do we want to? Would it be hard to do such things? Can we do it?

There are people who have found the God of the Bible through 12 step programs. One thing that stands out in 12 step programs is the length some are willing to go to be with God. The steps involve confession, self-examination of character defects, prayer to let go of such defects, service to others, making restitution for harm done, and helping others do the same.

This may seem ridiculous or crazy, maybe even foolish. Yet are we to be fools for Christ? (See 1 Corinthians 4)

When working with others to share such experiences we may encounter those who do not want God or to grow with God. We can move on to someone else.

Luke 9:55 But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save *them*." And they went to another village.

We ought to be seeking spiritual productivity. When we meet resistance we can first evaluate ourselves to see if it is our own attitude or spiritual error. Then, when we are convinced we are at peace and with love not having fear or pride we can move onward to someone else. Arguing with others who do not want God is often not productive.

Grace Training

Titus 2:11 - 12 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age,

The grace of God teaches us, if we are following it. God gave instructions or commands for us to follow. Jesus was a teacher providing instructions.

Ephesians 6:4 And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

Luke 6:40 A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher.

Followers of Christ and the Bible, those who seek to comply with the Bible, will have much training to do. We all can choose each day to find a way to grow in the goodness of God and participate in God's grace with our hearts, minds, attitudes, words, and actions. We can each day choose to grow in simple ways, but this will require self-discipline and focus.

Matthew 6:33-34 "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day *is* its own trouble."