

Hindrances to Spiritual Growth

This lesson will focus on some of the common hindrances to our growth process.

Take note and grow!

Remember that God wants us to:
Know, Grow, Glow, Go

2 Pet 3:18

But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and forever.

Hindrances to Spiritual Growth

First truth: Growing as a Christian is not a once-for-all event but a continuous process. At conversion, we become a new person in Jesus Christ. Then, for the rest of our lives, we are "to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ" (Eph. 4:15).

Second truth: We have established that there are some basic disciplines which we can apply to our lives which will enable us to experience that growth. If we don't, we will not grow.

Hindrances to Spiritual Growth

Bible Study (as in studying God's Word) and Prayer are two of the best proven ways to grow as a Christian.

When we apply those two major principles/truths coupled with church attendance and obedience to what we are being taught, they should lead to a **third** truth: **Every Christian should experience growth.**

Unfortunately, this does not happen. Although all Christians should grow, and all Christians can grow, not all Christians do grow. Sad!

Hindrances to Spiritual Growth

We grow when our
practices
match with our
position!

Hindrances to Spiritual Growth

There are several reasons/hindrances to our spiritual growth. Many are “self-inflicted”.

For the most part, it is not because we don't have the tools, instructors, or the mental and spiritual acuity.

It is a matter of not prioritize God's Word, prayer, church attendance and obedience. We become focused on other things forgetting that “these things will pass away.”

Let us look at a few of the hindrances

Hindrance #1: Lack of Knowledge

Sometimes we do not grow because of a lack of knowledge. This is especially true of new Christians.

Someone once suggested that we should lock up new Christians for a year so they won't do much damage to the cause of Christ. Their zeal and enthusiasm often exceed their knowledge and understanding. This was of course a frivolous statement, but the point is valid.

Maybe this is a problem for some of us. We really want to grow but we lack knowledge and are not ready to do what it takes to acquire the knowledge needed to grow.

Proposed Solutions

These three steps may help:

First, be intentional about Bible Study/Discipleship Class. Learn with passion. Have notebook. Read and re-read. Ask the Holy Spirit to provide clarity where it is lacking.

Second, decide to read at least one book a month on spiritual things.

Third, establish a relationship with a more mature Christian which include getting together at least once a month for prayer and discussion.

Hindrance #2: Lack of Enthusiasm

Sometimes we do not grow because of a lack of enthusiasm. This is especially true of someone who has been a Christian for a long time. The greatest indictment of many Christians is not that they are falling short of the mark but that they have quit striving to reach the mark. **They have become complacent about their Christian life.**

Maybe this is a problem with some of us. We have been Christians for so long that it has become boring to us. We have lost the spirit of enthusiasm in our Christian life.

It is no longer exciting. We have lost our first love.

What is the solution?

Here are some suggestions:

First, Pray that the Lord will restore the “joy of your salvation”

Second, look around for Christians who seem to have that contagious enthusiasm and set up some specific times to be with them.

Third, write a story about your own conversion experience/share your testimony. Sometimes remembering our initial encounter with Christ will rejuvenate our faith.

Hindrance #3: Lack of Awe/Wonder

Sometimes the problem is not that we lack knowledge or enthusiasm. Sometimes the problem is that we begin to take God's blessings for granted and get so accustomed to them that they fail to stimulate us as they once did. In this case, the problem is a lack of awe/wonder.

If the stars came out only once a year, everybody would stay up all night to look at them. Since they come out every night, we soon take them for granted.

Maybe this is a problem for us. We have been so blessed for so long that we are no longer aware of these blessings nor are we grateful for them.

Proposed solutions

First, spend some time observing nature.

Observe a moth being reborn from its chrysalis and you will be filled with wonder and awe at this marvelous metamorphosis.

We think, "It's perfectly natural." But because it was natural, doesn't mean that it is not marvelous?

God does "marvelous" things all the times, but we have come to see them as "natural". Ask God to open your eyes to see Him in creation.

Proposed Solutions

Second, spend some time reading about and learning about the world in which we live.

Some television programs provide mind expanding stories about the marvelous animals, stars, galaxies, and complexities of the human anatomies. God made them. Remind yourself of what an awesome God He is!

Read the creation of how mankind and the earth was created. From nothing....we were created.

Proposed Solutions

Third, ask lots of questions with the intent to learn.

Spend some time with people who know more than you do and ask them questions about different wonders of this world in which we live. Let them share their personal wonders. Ask How God brought them through their valleys.

If you know their pain, you will learn to share in their praise. Know their story to share in their glory!

We cannot contemplate the greatness of God and the world He has made without being touched with wonder.

Hindrance #4: Lack of Accountability

Sometimes the problem is that we lack the kind of accountability to others which will keep us on track in our spiritual pilgrimage.

What do I mean by accountability?

This means to open our lives to one or a few carefully selected, trusted, loyal confidants who will speak the truth to you. You give them the right to examine, question, and appraise your life.

Who are you accountable to?

Why is this important?

Every person's perspective is partial and limited and we need to balance our limited perspective with the broader perspective from another person.

Proverbs 13:10 puts it like this: "Through presumption comes nothing but strife, but with those who receive counsel is wisdom."

Maybe this is a problem for some of us. We have so isolated ourselves from other Christians that we are accountable to no one but ourselves. As a result, we have allowed ourselves to fall into some habits which are keeping us from moving forward in our Christian life.

What is the solution?

First, find an accountability partner and begin to develop a relationship with that person.

Second, find a group of people with whom you can meet on a regular basis to share your struggles, joy and your dreams as Christians.

Third, establish some specific goals and regularly evaluate your life against those goals.

Hindrance #5: Lack of Commitment

Sometimes the problem is a lack of commitment.

All of the other hindrances are, in a way, simply a manifestation of this final hindrance: a lack of commitment to Christ.

We are living in a day and age when people almost instinctively draw back from the idea of commitment. No one wants to be committed to family, church, studies, etc.

Hindrance #5: Lack of Commitment

Some refrain from commitments because they fear it will rob them of their freedom. Truthfully, freedom comes only through commitment. The uncommitted person is not free but rather is bound by the desires and demands of the moment.

Some refrain from commitments because they fear they will not be able to follow through on them. They've made other commitments ... to a parent, or to a spouse ... and they have failed those commitments. As a result, they don't want to make an empty commitment to God.

Hindrance #5: Lack of Commitment

Maybe this is a problem with some of us.

We don't want to confine our life with a commitment we know we are not going to fulfill, so we just never make the commitment to spiritual growth.

This is dangerous. Failure to plan, is planning to fail.

What is the solution?

First, remember the grace and mercy of God.

Second, write down some specific commitments you need to make.

Third, put a timetable on these commitments.

Know that spiritual growth can be achieved as we remove these hindrances from our lives.

And So What?

There are many reasons/hindrances to spiritual growth. Maybe yours was not mentioned. Asked the Holy Spirit to reveal it (them). Pray fervently. Decide to break that hold. Commit to growth. You can't afford not to grow.

If you don't, you are aborting your future, your generation future and God's plan for humanity.

Hindrances to Spiritual Growth, Part II

Key Scripture: Matthew 13:1-8; 18-23

Key Questions

Let us begin by reflection of the following questions

1. If the gospel is the power of God—why doesn't everybody that hears it become a Christian?
2. If the Bible is the Word of God—why doesn't the Bible have the same effect on everyone who reads it?
3. If Jesus is the Son of God—why doesn't everyone believe in Jesus?

Key Questions

Let me take it one step further:

Why don't all those who hear the gospel become Christian?

Why don't most people or even Christians read the Bible, accept all its teachings and allow it to change their lives? What's with that?

Jesus told a parable that addresses all of the questions mentioned above and it also explains why some of us aren't growing and what we can do to change that!

Components of the Parable

There are three components of the parable

- **Sower:** the preacher, evangelist, you and me.....
- **Seed:** Scripture, the Bible that is also referred to as the Word of God.
- **Soil:** Souls (the Harvest field). The unsaved or regenerate or even us that need to grow.

In Luke 8:11 Jesus said, "The seed is the word of God." It is Productive; meant to produce fruit.

1 Pet. 1:23, "...having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever."

Components of the Parable

Productive as it could be, the seed cannot plant itself. It needs a Sower (the saints--us). That's what God has called every Christian to be—a seed Sower.

Ps. 126:6 says, "He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."

However, the **main focus is on the soil**. Even the best Sower, with the best seed, will never have a harvest unless he/she has soil/soul or the heart.

Matthew 13:19, "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart..."

Hindrances to Spiritual Growth, Part II

In this parable, Jesus is teaching why some of us don't grow.

- We read the Bible with your eyes
- We hear the Bible with your ears
- We understand it with our head/intellect

But we....

- We receive the Bible with your heart.

It is a closed book to anyone whose heart is not right with God.

According to Jesus, there are **four** kinds of hearts.

Which heart is yours?

I. Stubborn Hearts Reject The Word

Matthew 13:4, "And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside, and the birds came and devoured them."

The wayside is similar to our sidewalks today.

The Jewish people would walk through fields, and they would basically take the same path, again and again, to wherever they were going.

The ground become rock hard as people would trample down all of the grass.

The soil could get on the ground, but it could not get in the soil.

Jesus said there are some hearts just like that.

I. Stubborn Hearts Reject The Word

Some come to church every Sunday, and when they hear a sermon, it goes in one ear and out the other.

Heb. 4:7 says, "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts."

We can harden your hearts to sin. When we do, we also harden your heart to the Savior, and then to the Scripture. Then we don't want to listen to anything the Bible has to say about salvation, about stewardship, about service, about spirituality.

We may put some change in the plate but no change in the heart.

II. Shallow Hearts Remove The Word

Matthew 13:5-6, "Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away."

This is **DECEPTION**.

Much of Israel is limestone and bedrock that is covered over with a thin layer of soil. Whenever you plant seed on this soil it cannot take root. It may appear to begin to grow, but it soon runs into hard rock.

Here, **seed get in but can't get down.**

II. Shallow Hearts Remove The Word

vv. 20-21, "But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles."

Jesus here is describing a person who comes to Him and supposedly makes a decision for Jesus. But it is superficial shallowed emotionalism that does not become true salvation.

These kind of people appear to go up like a rocket, but very shortly come down like a rock.

II. Shallow Heart's Remove The Word

The reason they fall away is because of

- Trials
- Troubles
- Tribulations

As long as everything is going well in their lives, they are in church and connected to God.

But when the first trouble hits, they're gone; they turn away.

They say, "Jesus is not what I thought he was. Christianity is not what I thought it was. I didn't sign up for this!"

This is a "shallow heart." There was really no life.

II. Shallow Heart's Remove The Word

George Whitefield is one of the greatest preachers in the history of America had a divine insight into this.

Toward the end of his ministry when somebody asked him how many converts he felt that he had, here's what he said:

"There are so many stony-ground hearers which receive the word with joy that I have determined to suspend my judgment till I know the tree by its fruits."

III. Strangled Hearts Restrict The Word

"And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them." (v.7)

The first soil was where seed could not get in.

The second soil was where seed could not get down.

The third soil where the seed **cannot get out**.

The reason is it is sown among thorns, weeds, briars, and brambles, and the life of it is literally choked out.

III. Strangled Hearts Restrict The Word

V.22, "Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful."

There are three things, according to the Lord, that can literally choke the spiritual life out of a person.

These three things can prevent them from having a true relationship with God.

III. Strangled Hearts Restrict The Word

- ❖ There are the Problems of life that we all have, and unfortunately people don't realize that Christians have problems just like non-Christians.
- ❖ There are the Prosperities of life; the tendency to make this world your home, and care about everything about the world that is here and nothing about the world to come.
- ❖ There are the Pleasures of life; the desire to make sure that you live in comfort and ease and not count the cost of following Jesus Christ.

III. Strangled Hearts Restrict The Word

Jesus here is describing people that probably make up most of the church today. We/they are trying to hold Jesus with one hand and the world with the other.

These are people who make a decision for God because they are broken – over their sins, but they're never broken– from their sins.

These are people who are so earthly minded that they are no heavenly minded. They don't want to get grounded and remain content in their situation/shallowness.

Reproduce The Word

"But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty." (v.8)

Now Jesus here talks about a soil that is fertile and a soil that is fruitful.

Matthew 13:23. "But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."

Reproduce The Word

Jesus says three things about this soil.

- First of all, it is **RECEPTIVE** to the word of God.

This is a person who "hears the word." That means instead of "going in one ear and out the other" this is a person who has the word go into his ear, get into his mind, and down into his heart.

Reproduce The Word

The second characteristic of the soil is that it is:

➤ RESPONSIVE

It is responsive to the word of God because it not only hears it, it also understands it.

The word "understands" means to understand with comprehension and to be willing to do what you understand you're being told to do.

Reproduce The Word

The third characteristic is that it is:

➤ **REPRODUCTIVE**

Reproductivity of the word of God because it bears fruit.

That is the real key—fruit. Everything else is just talk. Let me tell you what all of this means.

Do you know

If the word of God is not bearing fruit in your life,
you're not studying the word of God;
you're not hearing the word of God;
you're not receiving the word of God.

Reproduce The Word

We can call this sermon "Minority Report" because it is shocking to realize that three-fourths of the seed did not bear fruit.

This is so important to understand. The problem in the parable is not with the Sower, and the problem is not with the seed, the problem was with the soil.

Whenever someone says to me, "You know I read my Bible but I never get anything out of it," I immediately know the problem is not with the Bible, the problem is with the person.

Reproduce The Word

You know the number one reason why the average person will go through life and never solve their greatest problem?

Because they never know what it is.

The heart of the human problem is the problem of the human heart. But if you fail to identify the problem, you'll never find the solution.

Reproduce The Word

Joke:

I heard about a woman who came into the house one day and said, "Honey, we've got trouble with the car; it's got water in the carburetor." The husband said, "Water in the carburetor, that's ridiculous."

She said, "I'm telling you, the car has water in the carburetor." The husband said, "You don't even know what a carburetor looks like. Where is the car?" She said, "In the swimming pool."

Reproduce The Word

Now what is the point of the parable for you and me?

Simply this: the Gospel is the power of God, the Bible is the word of God and Jesus is the Son of God, but you will only believe this and receive this with a surrendered heart.

Which heart is yours? What kind of heart you are?

God want to take a stubborn heart, moved it to a shallow heart, moved it to a strangled heart, and change it to a surrendered heart.

Here is how it can be done

1) You must allow the Plowing of the Soil

The first type of soil mentioned in the parable is the "path." This represents hearts that are hardened (stubborn) and resistant to God's Word.

Just as a seed cannot grow on a hardened path, God's Word cannot penetrate a hardened heart. To cultivate our hearts for spiritual growth, we must prepare them to receive God's Word.

We can do this by getting enough rest before attending church, seeking understanding through prayer and studying, and applying the message to our own lives instead of focusing on others.

Hindrances to Spiritual Growth, Part II

II. You must allow the Putting Down of Roots

The second type of soil is rocky (Shadow) ground.

This refers to hearts that lack depth and cannot develop strong roots. Without deep roots, plants wither when faced with trials. Similarly, shallow Christianity cannot withstand difficulties.

To put down roots, we must attend church regularly, read the Bible daily, and obey God's commands. These practices help us grow deeper in our faith and persevere through challenges.

Hindrances to Spiritual Growth, Part II

III. You must allow for the Pulling out of the Weeds

The third type of soil is filled with thorns or weeds (strangled hearts). These represent the cares of life and the desires for worldly wealth, which choke out the Word of God. Pursuing material wealth consumes our energy and prevents spiritual growth.

To overcome this hindrance, we need to prioritize God over worldly possessions. We can start by tithing, giving offerings, and serving others.

By restructuring our lives and focusing on spiritual riches, we can break free from the grip of materialism.

And So What?

If we truly desire spiritual growth, we must plow the soil of our hearts, put down roots, and pull the weeds of worldly desires.

By preparing our hearts to receive God's Word, persevering through trials, and prioritizing spiritual riches, we can experience a bountiful harvest in our lives.

Let us remember that when we align our lives with God's plan, the results are truly miraculous.

And So What?

1. Do you have a hardened, oblivious or Stubborn heart?

(Matthew 13:19): If so, the Word is falling, and it's being eaten by birds. Determine to change that!

2. Do you have a shallowed or Troubled heart?

(Matthew 13:20-21): If so, when you hear the Word, it like it's falling on rocky ground. It starts to grow, but because there's not much soil, it doesn't last long. Allow some "Putting down".

When life gets tough, we need deep roots in Jesus to help us through it.

Hindrances to Spiritual Growth, Part II

3. Do you have a Strangled or Distracted heart?

(Matthew 13:22): This is like the seed that falls among thorns. The **Problems, Prosperities and Pleasure** of life choke out the good news, and it doesn't grow.

Be **Receptive, Responsive** and **Reproduce**.

4. Do you have a Fertile or Surrendered heart?

(Matthew 13:23): It means the seed is falling on good soil and you are growing strong and you are producing a lot of fruit. Are You?