

Why Should I Step Up Spiritually?

M. W. Bassford

6-29-08

Introduction.

- A. When I first began to work as a preacher, there were a lot of aspects of my work that I already knew about and anticipated. However, in the two-plus years I've been here, there have been some surprises, especially about what things would prove most challenging. Coming in, I expected evangelism to be a struggle, and it has been. What I didn't expect, though, were the challenges posed by the process of edification.
- B. The obstacles for evangelism are obvious. After all, in our efforts to save the lost, we basically have to persuade them to leave behind the attractions of the sinful world for a life that those around us regard with disdain. Back in the day, I thought that once someone came to the Lord, that was the hard part. Thereafter, the process of growing in Christ was the easy part. I thought that all Christians, if shown the truth in a clear and simple manner, would consistently and noticeably mature in a very natural fashion.
- C. In reality, what I've learned is that it is almost as difficult to persuade someone to become a better Christian as it is to persuade them to become a Christian at all. Spiritual growth isn't something that just happens to us without conscious effort. Instead, if we want to mature, we have to invest a lot of time and energy in it, persevere through setbacks and disappointments, and then, once we've reached our goal, look upward again to the next goal. A lot of Christians look at all that work and decide they're happy where they are.
- D. Despite this, though, despite the hard work involved in spiritual growth, it's something that we all need to be engaged in, Christian or not. The demands that it makes on us are great, but the rewards are even greater. Let's look at some of those rewards this morning. Let's ask, "Why should I step up spiritually?"

I. My Goals.

- A. The first and most obvious reason why we should look to step up spiritually is **TO IMITATE JESUS**. Presumably, that's why all of us are here in the first place: we worship Jesus and want to be like Him, because He embodies everything we value. If being like Jesus is our goal, we have to recognize that it's going to take some effort. Look at the way Paul describes Jesus in Philippians 2:5-8. Jesus was someone who was devoted to doing God's will. He would give up anything and do anything if that's what God wanted Him to do.
- B. Obviously, none of us are to that point, but if being a disciple of Jesus means anything to us, we're going to do our best to get there. We're going to step up. This may mean attending more church services than we already do so that we can learn more about Jesus. This may mean offering to teach Bible classes or participating in the public worship so that we can help others learn to be like Him. This may even mean dedicating ourselves to more humble, private acts of service outside of the assembly, like Jesus did when He washed the apostles' feet. The answers may be different, but the goal is the same. We need to be like Him.
- C. This may seem like a lot of effort and struggle, and it is, but interestingly enough, we can also step up spiritually in order **TO FIND PEACE**. Consider the promise that Paul makes in Philippians 4:9. This may seem counter-intuitive, but it's true. The more effort we invest in obeying God, the more peace we will find. This has some profound implications for the way we need to order our lives. For most of us, we live in a world of not enough: not enough time, not enough money, not enough energy, and so on. Because this is true, we have to budget our resources, and distinguish between what we have to do and what we simply want to do. In this budgeting process is where many Christians make a terrible mistake. They start treating the time they spend with God, the money they give to God, and the effort they spend in His service as wants rather than needs. They cut back on those things and put resources toward earthly considerations that they think are more urgent. The problem with that process is that all it does is shows Satan that he has an opening. It gives him all the reason he needs to shove more and more distractions into our lives, till we aren't serving God at all.
- D. By contrast, if we put God's kingdom and righteousness first, God has promised us that all of those other things will be added. I think we see the fruits of these choices every Sunday morning. Let's ask ourselves: in this congregation, who is it who seems to have the most hectic, chaotic lives? Who is it who seems to be totally crushed by the weight of their responsibilities, who's always rushing here and rushing there in an attempt to salvage something? Is it the strong Christians, the folks who give to God first? Or is it the weak Christians, who try to skimp on what they devote to Him? I think we know what the answer is, don't we? If we find ourselves trapped in that frenzied, chaotic lifestyle, the way out is by giving more to God, not less.
- E. Similarly, we can also step up spiritually **TO KNOW JOY**. The world is convinced that this is absolutely not true. The world thinks that the Christian life is a life of misery, in which you don't ever get to do anything fun. And so the world rushes headlong into all of those sins that promise so much and deliver so little, and THEY end up being the ones who are unhappy. By contrast, even trials can be joyful to the Christian. Look at the attitude of the apostles in Acts 5:40-41. They've just been beaten, and they're happy about it! Why? Because such opposition from the devil is a sign that Jesus is happy with them, and that makes them happy. Folks, the

more we invest ourselves in Christianity, the more we will also find joy, no matter what our circumstances may be. Once again, folks, let's be honest: Who in this congregation has more joy? Is it the people who are truly committed to Jesus, or is it the people who limp along with one foot in the church or one foot in the world? I'm reminded of a saying about Christians like that. The saying goes that they've got just enough religion to be miserable. Is that true of our life experience? Are we miserable Christians? If so, the problem isn't that we're too committed. The problem is that we aren't committed enough. Let's step it up.

II. God's Goals.

- A. A big part of the reason why the righteous are more peace-filled and more joyful comes from the next idea that we're going to look at. The Bible also teaches us that we should seek greater devotion to Christ in order **TO FULFILL OUR PURPOSE**. Consider what Solomon says about who we are in Ecclesiastes 12:15. As human beings, the center of our existence is to fear God and keep His commandments. If we don't do that, we will suffer for it, because we aren't designed to do anything else. It reminds me of the home-improvement project I'm working on currently. I'm filling in the swimming-pool hole in my backyard with dirt from this big dirt berm I've got. When I first started doing this, I didn't have a real wheelbarrow. I had this thing that called itself a lawn cart. It looked kind of like a wheelbarrow, but it was really designed for ladies like my mother to keep their pots in as they putter around in their flowers. So I've got this lawn cart, and I start dumping several hundred pounds of dirt in it at a time and hauling it around the yard. In about two weeks' time, I took that cart from nearly new to totally destroyed. Why? Because I wasn't using it for its intended purpose. Friends, if we don't use ourselves for OUR intended purpose, we'll destroy ourselves too. The only way to find happiness and fulfillment is to devote ourselves to God's work, just like He designed us to.
- B. This leads us naturally to our next reason to step it up spiritually: **TO GLORIFY GOD**. God deserves so much from us. He created us, He saved us, He helps us, and He will give us an eternal home with Him. One of the main ways we give back to Him is by glorifying Him, and only by greater and greater commitment can we truly see that He is glorified. Look at Paul's thoughts about how this works in Philippians 1:9-11. The more spiritual we become, the more God is praised by our lives. On the other hand, of course, if we are weak, unwilling, uncommitted Christians, do we bring any glory to God at all? No one is glorified by failure. I've never seen a bumper sticker that read, "My child just flunked fifth grade." Let's work on being a glory to our Father too.
- C. As part of this glorification effort, we should also step up our service to Him **TO SAVE OTHERS**. Consider the pattern that Jesus lays out in Matthew 5:14-16. As we let our good works shine before men, that will lead them to glorify God themselves. Therefore, if we aren't bringing people to Christ, we must not be doing a good enough job of shining. Is anybody here pleased with the way that things have been going evangelistically recently? Brethren, the baptistery behind me is as dry as a bone, and it's been that way for months. Every member of this church bears a share of the responsibility for that. We need to do better, and that starts with shining better. Let's be more committed so that we can save the souls of those around us.
- D. However, evangelism is not the only goal before us. We also need to step up our spiritual commitment in order **TO BE MORE FRUITFUL**. Peter makes us a promise about the results of spiritual growth in 2 Peter 1:8. What Peter is telling us here is that as we mature and grow as Christians, we will naturally find that our new maturity bears fruit in our lives. We will be able to point to things that happen in our sphere of influence and say, "That's something I helped God with!" That's the only possible way to bring meaning to our lives. I went to law school with the elite of the elite: men and women who will be millionaires, senior partners in law firms, and famous politicians. But you know what? I wouldn't trade lives with any of them, because when I get to the end of mine, I'll be able to look back on it and see that I did things that mattered. That's true for all of us. In the grand scheme of things, nothing we do with our jobs or our hobbies or any of that is going to prove to be important. Only the fruit we bear for God because we love Him and love our neighbor will matter.
- E. Finally, though, we need to step up our spiritual commitment **TO INHERIT THE PROMISES**. Consider the Hebrews writer's thoughts on this in Hebrews 6:11-12. We've looked at all kinds of bad consequences that half-hearted Christianity has in this life, but it has bad consequences in the next life too. As this passage makes clear, being sluggish and uncommitted isn't just a lifestyle choice to which God is indifferent. It's a choice that can cause us to miss out on eternal life. At some point in time, folks, we become so uncommitted that we've actually fallen away, whether we show up at church every couple weeks or not. I don't know exactly where that point is. I don't know how little effort I can put into serving God before He gets disgusted with my apathy and rejects me. But you know what? I have absolutely no interest in finding out where that point is, either. And yet, if we choose to remain right where we are as Christians, if we have no interest in doing more or being more than we were as babes in Christ, that's the point we're headed toward. God doesn't want people who aren't really interested in Him. He doesn't want people who look on Christianity as nothing more than a fire-insurance policy and come to church to pay their premiums every week. He wants people who love Him and want to be like Him, who are trying the best they can to serve Him, but who just keep messing up because of the sin in their lives. If we're people like that, we'll inherit the promises from Him.

Conclusion. If you aren't in line to inherit those promises, you can get in that line today.