

MONDAY**Hebrews 4:15-16 (ESV)**

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

All spiritual growth happens because God does something in us. God has sent the Holy Spirit into our hearts as believers to actively shape us into the image of Jesus. But, this doesn't mean that God wants us to sit back and relax and let Him work while we remain idle. God has designed it so that we will get His help as we obey and seek Him. The Bible strikes a balance when it comes to our spiritual growth. If we grow, it's because God caused it to happen. He gets the credit. If we don't grow, it's because our laziness or disobedience has hindered His work. It's our fault.

One of the ways we see this principle at work is prayer. Prayer itself has no power in and of itself. The power comes from the One we are praying to – God. When we do our part and depend on God in prayer, He sends the help. When we pray, He unlocks the door to more of His grace that enables more growth. The writer of Hebrews (4:16) explains that we will “receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” What unlocks the door to God's help? We “draw near” to God. One of the primary ways we do this is through prayer.

- If you haven't made prayer a regular habit in your life, begin today! Here's a quick guide for prayer that can get you started. Start out thinking about God and who He is – Praise Him. Then, inspect your heart and life as you search for sin – Confess to Him. Now, think of all the blessings that God has given you – Thank Him. Finish with the needs and burdens that are on your heart for yourself and others – Ask Him.
- Think about the areas of your life where you need God's wisdom for decisions and direction in your life. Ask Him for wisdom, believing that He will show you His will.

TUESDAY

Psalm 119:11, 14 (ESV)

I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you... In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches.

Storing up God's Word in our hearts is our job as believers. We do this in various ways – listening to Bible teaching, reading the Bible, memorizing verses, meditating on a passage, studying a passage, and obeying it. When we do our part in putting God's Word into our hearts, God begins rooting out the sin that still lingers deep within us. Listen to what Hebrews 4:12 tells us about the power of God's Word in us: "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." God uses His Word to reveal what is right and wrong deep inside us and to show us what steps we should take next in our walk with Him. The Psalmists says that, over time as we understand the Bible's value and the satisfaction it brings, it will become something we value more than an abundance of riches!

- How would you rate your desire to spend time alone in God's Word on a scale from 1 to 10 with 1 being "I never even think about it" to 10 being "It's the highlight of my day and wouldn't miss it for the world!"? Tell God about how you rated yourself and ask Him to help you have a greater desire for His Word.
- As you head back home from camp at the end of this week, ask someone who walks with the Lord to help you develop a plan for reading the Bible and storing it in your heart. Ask this person to keep encouraging you to stay in His Word. Have this person ask you periodically what you are learning.

WEDNESDAY - ENCOURAGEMENT

Romans 1:11-12 (ESV)

For I long to see you... to strengthen you... that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

An out-of-towner drove his car into a ditch in a desolated area. Luckily, a lo-cal farmer came to help with his big strong horse, named Buddy. He hitched Buddy up to the car and yelled, "Pull, Nellie, pull!" Buddy didn't move. Then the farmer hollered,

"Pull, Buster, pull!" Buddy didn't respond. Once more the farmer command-ed, "Pull, Coco, pull!" Nothing. Then the farmer nonchalantly said, "Pull, Buddy, pull!" And the horse easily dragged the car out of the ditch. The motorist was most appreciative and very curious. He asked the farmer why he called his horse by the wrong name three times. The farmer said, "Oh, Buddy is blind and if he thought he was the only one pulling, he wouldn't even try."

Living for Jesus in our culture is not easy. We make it more difficult when we don't link arms with others who want to grow in Christ like we do. When we isolate ourselves from other believers, we can become easily discour-aged. Have you noticed how easy it is to worship, pray, study the Bible, and do what's right when you're at camp with a whole bunch of other believers? That's because there is strength in numbers. We need each other's' encour-agement not only when we are at camp but every day of the year.

- Who are your closest friends? Are they encouraging you to obey Jesus or do they have the opposite effect?
- What people in your life are encouraging you to keep growing in your walk with the Lord? If you can't think of any, seek out other believers who can encourage you to follow Jesus wholeheartedly.

THURSDAY

James 1:2-4 (ESV)

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

One day a farmer's donkey fell into a well. The animal cried out for hours as the farmer tried to figure out what to do. Finally, he decided that the animal was very old, and the well needed to be covered up anyway; it just was not worth it to retrieve the donkey. He invited all his neighbors to come over and help him. Everyone grabbed a shovel and began to shovel dirt into the well. At first, the donkey realized what was happening and cried horribly. Then, to everyone's amazement he quieted down. A few shovel-loads later, the farmer finally looked down the well. He was astonished at what he saw. With each shovel of dirt that hit his back, the donkey was doing something amazing; he would shake it off and take a step up. As the farmer's neighbors continued to shovel dirt on the top of the animal, he would shake it off and take a step up. Pretty soon, everyone was amazed as the donkey stepped up over the edge of the well and happily trotted off. This fictitious story illustrates a valuable lesson. Life will throw all kinds of dirt on our backs. We may feel like there is no way out. But, God has another idea. He wants to use the difficult times in our lives to raise us up to new levels of growth and maturity.

One of the main ways that God grows our faith is through adversity. Our role is to not let adversity bury our faith. Instead, we should trust God to use the difficult things in our life for our good. Paul explains this in Romans 8:28: "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." As we trust God in difficult times, He grows our faith. When our faith is tested or exercised, the result will be that God will perfect or mature our faith.

- What difficulty in your life has God used to build greater faith in Him?
- Are you currently going through a tough time that seems to be burying your faith instead of building your faith? If so, seek out an older, more mature Christian to talk about it and ask for their prayers, wisdom, and encouragement.

FRIDAY**1 Timothy 4:7-8 (ESV)**

Train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godli-ness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

A man goes to the house where he grew up and knocks on the door. Be-cause he hadn't been there for 20 years, he finds himself getting sentimen-tal. He asks the owners if he can walk through the house, and they let him. While in the attic, he finds an old jacket of his. He puts it on, reaches into the pocket, and pulls out a stub. It's a receipt from a shoe repair shop. He realizes he had taken a pair of shoes there twenty years ago, and in the midst of the move, he had never picked them up. On a whim he decides to go to the shoe repair shop. Just to be funny, he takes the receipt out and hands it to the guy behind the desk, saying, "Are my shoes ready?" The guy goes back to the workroom for a minute, comes back to the counter, and says, "Come back a week from Thursday."

If we keep putting off the things we know God wants us to do, we will never experience the growth He wants to bring us. As we exercise our spiritual muscles in prayer, Bible reading, and obedience, God will mature our faith. If we remain inactive or passive in our approach to seeking God, our growth will slow or stop altogether. Ask yourself, are you willing to put in the work to grow and mature in your faith?

- This week, what have you learned about God's part in your growth?
- This week, what have you learned about your part in your growth?
- Write below your plan to "train yourself for godliness" when you get home from camp.