

MESSAGE MINDER

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But let us consider how we may spur one another on to love and good deeds.

Hebrews 10:24



Growing

By Jonathan Stone

The word *Christian(s)* appears in the bible 3 times. the word *disciple(s)* appears in the bible 269 times. We are not called to simply believe in Jesus, but to be His committed disciples. As disciples we continually grow, becoming more and more like Christ, our teacher. Jesus said it this way, "...everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher" (Luke 6:40). The point is not to be a mere convert of Jesus, but to be a disciple of Jesus. Therefore the path of discipleship is a path of growing.

Until one passes to the next life or Jesus returns the path of discipleship and the process of growth is unfinished. So, growing is a lifelong process. However, it is also a process that continues to get better and better. The Apostle Paul said it this way, "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are becoming transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Cor

3:18). There are seasons of waiting on the Lord, but when it comes to growing the path of the disciple is not meant to have extended holding patterns with no progress. We are to become more and more like Him. John the Baptist said it this way, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

Often we do not think or talk too much about becoming like Jesus, or at least not very seriously. Yet that is clearly the goal of spiritual formation in Scripture. It is also clearly a goal that we are meant to work towards for the entirety of our life. There is no graduation and there is no retirement. All of us are disciples becoming more like our teacher. Even though we are to work at it like it might actually come to pass tomorrow, it is clear that all of us will have to wait for the completion of the journey. The Apostle John said it this way, "Dear friends, now we are children

of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2).

While the final goal is not reached until we see Him face to face, there are benchmarks along the way. We can hear the Apostle Paul celebrating one such spiritual benchmark when he says, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. the life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal 2:20). Yet, we do not compare ourselves one to another. Nor do we fixate on our spiritual position, whether good or bad. Instead, we fix our eyes on him (Heb 12:2) and continue on the path of growing day by day, knowing that He is faithful to finish this good work that He has begun in each of us (Phil 1:6).

Commit to Begin, Continue to Grow

When I was in the third grade I told my parents that I wanted to take piano lessons. They did not question me too much on it, and soon had me enrolled with a solid piano teacher. Since I was starting from the beginning my piano teacher gave me a beginning piano book that had these words written large on the front cover: *First Grade Piano*.

I found this to be slightly embarrassing. After all, I was in the third grade and here I was stuck in a *first grade piano* book. I never told my teacher nor my parents about my uneasiness. If I would have I am sure they would have been able to help me understand. But in my mind I was already two years behind on this thing. Predictably, when the work began to get a little difficult I wanted to quit, and that is what I did. I never explained the true source of my discomfiture to my parents, and it was not until years later that I realized how silly my perspective had been. The truth of the matter was that not many of my friends had even taken piano lessons at that point, and few of those that had stuck it out.

It is important in our spiritual growth that we do not measure ourselves in terms of where we are compared to others. The truth is this, our perspective on spiritual progress is going to be just as skewed as my third grade perspective on a book

called *First Grade Piano*. What does matter is that we *commit to begin*, and that we *continue to grow*. Paul once looked at some believers that he and Apollos had been discipling and said, “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow” (1 Cor 3:6). We are instructed to examine ourselves (2 Cor 13:5). However, the truth is that we cannot make spiritual change happen in our lives. There are things that we can choose to do that we can be assured will bring about change in our lives, but only God can make us grow. Our job is to commit to begin, and if we continue in that commitment God will make us grow.

Discussion Questions

- (1) What do you think of when you think of the difference between a disciple and a convert?
- (2) Do you agree that your walk with God has gotten better and better? If not, why?
- (3) Have you ever found yourself stuck in the mentality that you cannot grow any more that you already have?
- (4) How does one break out of the mentality mentioned in the previous question?
- (5) What 2 or 3 of the most important ideas or perspectives or practices in growing in Christ-likeness?

