

The Real Reason You May Not Be Growing Spiritually

Have you ever wondered what's the real reason you're not as far as you'd like to be spiritually?

We blame it on the enemy, our busy lives, our careers, children, even the church we attend. The real reason you're not as far as you'd like to be spiritually isn't because of the enemy, busyness or the complexity of sermons; it's because we're distracted. Despite knowing that distractions hamper productivity, most people don't realize how it affects their spiritual growth.

In the few minutes it takes to read this blog post, chances are you'll pause to check your phone, answer a text, switch to your desktop to read an email, or glance at the Facebook or Twitter messages popping up in the corner of your screen. And pastors wonder why it is people are not growing spiritually. They're distracted!

The Danger of Distractions

The day before I began writing this post, I decided to run a small-scale case study on myself to count the number of times I was interrupted during the day. I did not silence my phone—nor did I disable any social media notifications (for example, email, Facebook, Twitter)—so I could get an accurate estimate of the number of interruptions I experienced.

The study only lasted about two hours; I got so distracted, I couldn't get any work done. It's hard to remain focused on the work in front of you, especially when it's something that requires commitment and all of your attention.

Interestingly, Dr. Gloria Mark, University of California Associate Professor at the Donald Bren School of Information

and Computer Sciences, found that workers are interrupted every three minutes—nearly 20 times per hour! When you're interrupted, you don't immediately go back to the task you were doing before you were interrupted. In fact, it takes 23 minutes to get back into the groove.

Now, we understand why we don't return to the habits (Bible reading, prayer, time alone with God, fasting and journaling) that help us to grow spiritually. What's the solution? Simplify your life by minimizing the distractions.

Minimizing The Distractions

Be Prepared. Take care of any physical needs BEFORE you spend time alone with God. Make sure you have your Bible study tools (Bible, notepad, electronic devices, etc.), drinks and snacks on-hand so that you don't have to keep getting up.

Pray. Before you start, it's important to prepare your heart, mind, and soul. Otherwise your mind will stray and you start to think about other matters. Mentally make a point of saying to yourself 'Lord, now I am going to focus on you for the next few hours.'

Go off the Grid. Turn off email alerts, set your phone to go straight to voice-mail and create an auto-response to text messages you receive that says something like, "In the middle of something; will get back to you later." Block chunks of time on your calendar as "Time Alone with God." For those few hours when you are off the grid, unless your job involves life-or-death situations, everyone will manage just fine without you.

If you don't have the discipline to do this, use a program like Anti-Social (which I use and love). It allows me to keep those programs open, but cuts off my connection for a specific time-period. It also allows me to keep my browser open for research.

Eliminating distractions is like any other skill; in other words, the more you practice it, the better you get. Don't get discouraged if you don't initially make as much progress as you'd like. Stick with the process and expect to improve. You will!

Question: What works best for you when you find yourself distracted?

The **Rev. Clarence E. Stowers Jr.** succeeded his father, Dr. Clarence Stowers Sr., as the pastor of the historic Mars Hill Baptist Church of Chicago in 1999. Mars Hill has experienced phenomenal ministry growth under his visionary pastoral leadership since then. Follow Rev. Stowers' blog, *The Urban Pastor*, or check out Mars Hill's website.

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