

Why God Doesn't Grow Us By Leaps and Bounds

"[T]hat you put off the former way of life in the old nature, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that you put on the new nature, which was created according to God in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:22-24).

Although God could instantly transform us, He has chosen to develop us slowly. Jesus was deliberate in developing his disciples, just as God allowed the Israelites to take over the Promised Land "little by little," so they wouldn't be overwhelmed (Deut. 7:22). He prefers to work in incremental steps in our lives.

Why does it take so long to change and grow up? There are several reasons:

- **We are slow learners.** We often have to relearn a lesson 40 or 50 times to really get it. The problems keep recurring, and we think, "Not again! I've already learned that!" But God knows better. The history of Israel illustrates how quickly we forget the lessons God teaches us and how soon we revert to our old patterns of behavior. We need repeated exposure.
- **We have a lot to unlearn.** Since most of our problems—and all of our bad habits—didn't develop overnight, it's unrealistic to expect them go away immediately. There is no pill, prayer, or principle that will instantly undo the damage of many years. It requires the hard work of removal and replacement. The Bible calls it "taking off the old self" and "putting on the new self" (Rom. 13:12; Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3:7-10, 14).
- **Growth is often painful and scary.** There is no growth without change; there is no change without fear or loss;

and there is no loss without pain. Every change involves a loss of some kind. We fear these losses, even if our old ways were self-defeating, because, like a worn out pair of shoes, they were at least comfortable and familiar.

- **Good habits take time to develop.** Remember that your character is the sum total of your habits. You can't claim to be kind unless you are habitually kind. Your habits define your character.

There is only one way to develop the habits of Christ-like character: You must practice them—and that takes time! There are no instant habits. Paul urged Timothy, *“Meditate on these things. Give yourself completely to them, that your progress may be known to everyone”* (1 Tim. 4:15).

Talk It Over

- Why do you think God allows us to go through pain and loss while we are growing spiritually?
- What is the bad habit that you've had trouble changing in your life?
- What one thing do you need to practice doing every day so that you are developing Christ-like character?

Rick Warren is the founding pastor of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California, one of America's largest and most influential churches. Rick is author of the New York Times bestseller *The Purpose Driven Life*. His book, *The Purpose Driven Church*, was named one of the 100 Christian books that changed the 20th century. He is also founder of , a global Internet community for pastors.

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