

6 Roadblocks That Will Stop Your Spiritual Growth

A few days ago, I was driving from my home in Georgia to a church in Alabama to preach for five days. I didn't think the predicted "snowpocalypse" would hinder my trip until I arrived in the town of Anniston—where state troopers had blocked the main road due to ice on bridges.

The road was closed, and I couldn't get to Birmingham on Highway 431. When I tried a different route, I ran into more ice and more roadblocks. This had never happened to me in Florida—we don't have ice on roads. So I was stuck. I had to turn around and go home.

Thankfully, my host rescheduled our meetings, and I arrived at his church two days later, after all the feared ice had melted. But the whole experience reminded me that there are times when we can't get where we need to go because our roads are blocked.

As Christians, we are called to move forward in our faith. The apostle Paul set the example for us when he said: "I press toward the goal to the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14). You are not supposed to stay in the same place spiritually year after year. God wants you to grow. But often we get stuck, usually because of one of these six roadblocks:

1. Lack of spiritual hunger. Let's face it: The main reason many Christians get stuck in a rut is they are happy to be there. But God is looking for people who refuse to be content with where they were last year. He is calling you higher. You must ask the Holy Spirit to set your heart ablaze with a desire for more of His presence and power.

David is our example of spiritual hunger. He wrote: "As the

deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants after You, O God" (Ps. 42:1). He actually felt lousy when he wrote those words, so we can't use our discouragement as an excuse. David fanned the flames of spiritual fervor even when he felt like quitting.

2. Plain old laziness. Many of us become motivated at the beginning of the year to pray, study the Bible, go back to school or lose weight. But nobody wins a race by sprinting the first 50 feet and then sitting down. Winners must stay in the game. You must be determined to finish what you start instead of leaving a trail of aborted attempts.

Paul exhorted the Romans to be "fervent in spirit," but first he warned them not to be "lazy" (see Romans 12:11-12). The Greek word used here, "okneros," is the same word Jesus used in the parable of the "lazy servant" who didn't invest the money he was given by his master. If you are sitting on your dreams or procrastinating when you should be growing your faith, the "lazy" label applies. Don't just start and then give up. Be consistent and keep going.

3. Unpacked baggage. The Israelites who left Egypt could have marched into the Promised Land in a matter of weeks, but they ended up in a holding pattern for 40 years. Why? They were dragging their sin with them. The more weight you drag behind you, the less likely it is that you will reach your destination.

I knew a Christian guy who had a thriving ministry to college students. But because he refused to get help for his pornography habit, his addiction prevented him from functioning normally. It finally weighed him down so much that it destroyed both his marriage and ministry. You may think you can "manage" your sin, but it is more powerful than you are. You can't move forward while carrying a load of shame and addictions. Repent, confess your weakness to someone else and get free.

4. Fear of change. Many people feel a tug in their hearts that says: *Start that Bible study. Go on that mission trip. Write that book. Launch that business.* But they never get past step one because they feel frozen in their tracks. Nothing will keep you in spiritual limbo like fear. It paralyzes.

Some people keep their dreams inside them for decades—and then they take them to the grave. If you want to grow, you must take risks. Don't let your fear of public speaking, airplanes, crowds, strangers or people's criticism stop you from trusting in the God who is bigger than all those things.

5. Shallow relationships. Who are you hanging around with? Abraham had to part ways with Lot because they had very different goals. Lot had a selfish motive, and Abraham was fully surrendered to God's plan. If you spend all your time with selfish people who are content to live spiritually fruitless lives, you will end up just like them.

If you want to move forward spiritually in 2017, don't expect the crowd to go with you. Some people don't want God's presence. Don't let them drag you down. Be willing to find new friends who will support your spiritual commitment.

6. A religious spirit. Religious people build memorials to honor what God did in 1967, sing songs from that era and write books about "the way we've always done it." Yet when the Holy Spirit calls them to "sing ... a new song" (Psalm 96:1), or if He starts doing "a new thing" (Isaiah 43:19a), they get offended. They insist God must move the exact same way He did 50 years ago.

But God does not stay in the same place or do things the same way. His character is unchangeable, but He always has a fresh word and a new anointing to pour on His people. He loves to surprise and overwhelm us. Don't let religious inflexibility keep you from experiencing the adventure of following His Spirit. {eoa}