

Producing Beautiful Change in the Process of Spiritual Growth

I think one of the greatest lessons God ever taught me is that we can't change ourselves—only He can help us grow and mature. How does He do it? Growth occurs when we spend time with the Lord and pursue a more intimate relationship with Him.

When we take time to read and study His Word, the Bible says *we are constantly being transfigured into His very own image in ever increasing splendor and from one degree of glory to another...* (2 Corinthians 3:18 AMPC). Throughout our lives, He continues to work with us and help us grow, gradually becoming more like Him.

God causes us to begin noticing things in our behavior that maybe we didn't notice before. Thank heaven, He doesn't show us everything we need to change all at once or we'd be overwhelmed! But God knows exactly how much we can handle, and at the perfect time.

I'll give you an example. Over the years, the Lord has worked with me quite a bit about my mouth. I used to be very harsh, judgmental, and critical. I can remember so many times when my husband, Dave, and I would get into an argument, then afterward the Lord would speak to my heart and say, "I want you to go and apologize to him." *But God!* I would think. *He's guilty, too. Why can't he apologize to me?*

It used to make me so mad that Dave could "get away with things" that I couldn't. But the Lord works with each one of us at different times about different things. I'm not responsible for Dave—I'm only responsible for what the Holy Spirit shows *me* to do.

It's also vitally important to remember that when the Holy Spirit shows us something that needs to change, we can't do it on our own. It is only through God's strength and spending time with Him that we become more like Christ and make an impact here on earth.

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Second Corinthians 5:20 says, *We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us...* (NIV). In other words, we are here to show Jesus to the world. In fact, each one of us has a distinct sphere of influence. There are people *you* can reach that nobody else can! That's why Jesus says it's so important for you to "let your light shine before others" (Matthew 5:16 NIV).

I think when it comes down to it, we all just want to be happy. And here's the truth: Growing up spiritually is the only way we'll ever truly be happy.

Before God helped me to grow and change, I was easily controlled by my circumstances; I was only happy when everything was going well. I constantly made decisions based on how I felt "in the moment," and it was a recipe for true misery!

I lived this way for years. I thought, *I'll be happy if Dave stops playing so much golf. I'll be happy when my kids start helping me more around the house. I'll be happy when that aggravating person at church finally changes.*

But God helped me learn that if we're going to wait for our circumstances to change in order to be happy, then we'll never be happy! God wants to help us rise above the circumstances in our lives. He desires for us to have His joy and peace on the when things aren't perfect.

For years, I wanted everyone and everything else to change. But God has a better plan! He says to us, "I want *you* to change."

Growing and changing isn't about trying to be perfect or earning God's love and approval. However, the Lord loves you too much to let you stay where you are. I've learned that when God shows us an area of our life that needs to change, He's doing it because He loves us enough to help us change.

God will often begin working in our hearts in very private ways. Then, just like a caterpillar transforms into a butterfly, He begins to change and transform us into something completely different—more free and beautiful than ever.

It's easy to get frustrated and think we'll never it's not impossible with God. That's why it's so important to never give up! During those times when you feel like you're at your lowest, God is getting ready to put you in your own little cocoon and produce something beautiful and new.

Remember, spiritual growth is a *process*. None of us "arrives" overnight, but little by little, God changes us and a makes us what we ought to be. *He makes us more like Him.*

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