

Seven Critical Steps to Enhance your Spiritual Growth & Personal Development in 2018

BY

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Introduction

Our success in 2018 will be directly related to what we utilize to measure what we believe is important. Oswald Chambers said *“the best measure of a spiritual life is not its ecstasies but its obedience.”*

There is a Chinese Proverb that says, “The gem cannot be polished without friction, nor man perfected without trials.” The Apostle Paul stated: “For I am sure of this very thing, that the one who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus (Phil 1:6).” Paul assures us as Christians that what God started in us He will finish. It will be perfected or matured until the Lord Jesus returns. But how does a disciple of Jesus grow in his or her Christian life? What does it take to mature in faith differently than what we are presently doing in 2018? What we cover tonight will be essential for both members and non-members of our church. These are all topics we will address tonight in this study. Let me start by revisiting our church values that you will discover on our church web-site. I wrote these values because they must be the essential things that guide all we do as a church. Most of the decisions that people make in life good or bad will be guided by a set of values or principles. The one thing we must understand is this: “You can’t discover your values in a crisis you must have values before the crisis occurs, otherwise you will be guided and directed by the latest trend or popular solution.

Principle One: Know Your Values and Make Sure They Are Aligned with God

Values are like a compass they guide our decision making and keep us in alignment with our ultimate objectives. Without a consistent set of values aligned with God you will make decisions that are inconsistent. We must remember that Satan is always present and his objective is to get us off track, throw roadblocks in our path and influence our decisions, especially in stressful situations or in the heat of passion. His desire is always the same to kill, steal and destroy. He steals our time, talent and treasure by engaging us in activities and

chasing things that ultimately have no eternal value. How well are you doing with what matters most in your life? Are people influencing you to do what you know is wrong. Are you engaged in a lot of religious activities but you are personally drowning spiritually? What changes do you need to make in 2018 to enhance spiritual success? This is an opportunity for you to document some personal truths and take an honest self-inventory of your shortcomings.

- Now what about your own values, how aligned are they with God's word? Take a moment over the next couple of weeks to put your values in writing and share them with your family to ensure agreement and make sure they are aligned with God's Word. You will be amazed at the significant enhancement and improvement this will make once you get your values in writing and start to live by these principles.
- Now let's examine our church values and see the alignment with God's word.

Mission & Values

Central Baptist Church is on a mission to glorify God by joining Him in uniting our city to reach a community. Our desire is to strive to create an environment where people from all walks of life can experience God's grace and grow in a personal relationship with Him through Biblical teaching, genuine fellowship & love, and committed discipleship.

- ***We Value:*** Exalting the Savior. Psalm 34:1-3, John 12:32
- ***Modeling Grace:*** Embracing people where they are. Luke 15:20, 31-32; John 8:1-11; Romans 15:7; James 2:1
- ***Living Truth:*** Conforming our beliefs, attitudes, and actions to the Bible. John 1:14; Romans 12:1-2; James 1:19-21; 2 Timothy 3:16-17
- ***Demonstrating Love:*** Treating others as we would like God to treat us. He loved us yet while we were sinners. Matthew 7:12; John 13:34-35; 1 Corinthians 13:1-3
- ***Pursing Growth:*** Seeking greater personal growth in all situations. Psalm 119. 1 Corinthians 14:20, Ephesians 4:13-15
- ***Reproducing Faith:*** Intentionally passing on our faith to others. John 20:21, 2 Corinthians 5:20, Matthew 9:37-38; Proverbs 14:25, 2 Timothy 1:8

Principle Two: Be Guided and Directed by the Holy Spirit

The role of the Holy Spirit. One way that God is conforming believers into the image of Christ is through the work and empowerment or filling of the Holy Spirit. When we were saved we received the "baptism" of the Holy Spirit at which time we were indwelt by the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 12:13). This occurs one time. The indwelling Spirit gives us the inner spiritual resources to

overcome sin. He gives us the desires and abilities to resist temptation and overcome it. As we submit to God's commands following the leading of the Holy Spirit, we are "filled" with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18). This is a continuous process in which we allow the Spirit to direct and control our actions. On the other hand when we sin we stifle the blessing of the Spirit's activity in our lives. Paul states, "Do not quench the Spirit" (1 Thess. 5:19; NASB) and again, " Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30)

Principle Three: Understand that God uses trials to produce spiritual growth in our lives

When we examine the book of James we discover a very important principle: James writes:

" My brothers and sisters, consider it nothing but joy when you fall into all sorts of trails, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect effect, so that you will be perfected and complete, not deficient in anything" (James 1:2-4). How can one possibly be joyful in difficulties? It's because God is testing our faith and using the trial to bring us to maturity. We can rejoice not at the painful experience of the trial but at the opportunity for growth. We must understand that trials will either make us better or bitter and it will be totally based on how we view trials. I know numerous people who have utilized their trials to draw a closer relationship with God. I also know many people who have lost their spiritual focus and allowed their trails to make them bitter.

Principle Four: Understanding the Power & Importance of Doing Good Works

Good works have sometimes been downplayed by Protestant evangelicals due to teachings that have tried to make them as the basis or condition of salvation. While this concern is valid, one should not downplay them in the context of the Christian life, rather they need to be emphasized. While we are not saved by good works we are saved for good works. Paul writes,

" We are His workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works that God prepared beforehand so we may do them" (Ephesians 2:10). James adds to this concept pointing out that there is a relationship between faith and works in that good works mature our faith.

"You see that his faith was working together with his works and his faith was perfected by works... For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead" (James 2:22,26). Let's share a practical illustration, years ago the Salvation Army was holding an international convention and their founder, General William Booth, could not attend because of physical weakness. He sent a cable to the convention and the message was one word "**Others.**" When we shift our focus of life from our self to others, good works will naturally flow out of a life empowered by God.

Principle Five: We Must Constantly Demonstrate Humility & Forgiveness to an Undeserving Society

The hallmark of Christianity is forgiveness. God loved us and looked beyond our faults to see our needs. Forgiveness is not a license to overlook sin and turn the other cheek. However, we must have a mature biblical perspective and realize that as humans we all fall short and are in need of forgiveness. If we want forgiveness from God for our shortcomings, we must be willing to forgive others. All healthy relationships are based on authentic communications and sincere regard to see people succeed when they fall short. Jesus said by this all men will know you are my disciples when you demonstrate love for one another. A biblical comment you often here me make is “ How can we love God in whom we have not seen and hate our very own sisters and brothers in the body of Christ that we see on a daily basis.” **We are only kidding ourselves when our behavior reflects a lack of regard for other people.**

If you displayed more humility in 2018 how much more would your Christian light shine?
Consider how much more productive each of us could be if we were intentional in demonstrating greater humility.

Principle Six: Improve Your Decision Making

The biggest mistake we make in decision making is somehow believing that we are wiser than God. Now we don't intentionally leave God out of our decision making process. We are just so accustom to being self-sufficient, especially as Americans that we fail to consult God enough during our decision making process.

How do I make decisions in my Christian life? Josh McDowell gives us some helpful suggestions. His patterns are referred to as the (4) four C's. **The first C is 1.) Consider the Choice. What is right and wrong and who determines this? God is the one who determines what is right and wrong. The Old Testament prophet Micah states, “ He God has told you, O man, what is good, and what the Lord really wants from you” (Micah 6:8). Other people may give you advice, some of it good and some of it bad, but we have to come to grips with the fact that God alone has the ultimate authority of what is the right course to take.**

The second C is 2) Compare it to God's Word. What does the Scripture have to say about the situation and what does God desires of you? Since the scripture is God's revelation to man it is the message that God wants us to follow. In the Psalms we read, “Your word is a lamp to walk by, and a light to illumine my path” (Ps 119:105). **The third C is 3) Choose the biblical way.**

Make a commitment that you will follow the biblical way as the way that God wants you to go. “Who is the man who fears the Lord? He will instruct him in the way he should choose”

(Psalm 25:12). The fourth C is 4) Count on God for protection and provision. As we follow God’s path, we can trust Him for the outcome and blessing that he wants for us. Moses wrote, “ All these blessings will come to you in abundance if you obey the Lord your God” (Deut. 28:2).

Principle Seven: Have a Long Term Eternal Perspective

Lastly, success is something that happens over time. Therefore, all Christians need to be able to see beyond the here and now to the reality of what lies ahead. We need to be able to live in view of the light at the end of the tunnel. **If we have an eternal perspective, we better understand what God is doing with us and where we are heading, we will be in a good position to grow in the grace that God has given us, being conformed to the image of His Son. Paul writes in 2 Cor. 4:16-18:**

“Therefore we do not despair, but even if our physical body is wearing away, our inner person is being renewed day by day. For our momentary, light suffering is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison because we are not looking at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen. For what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.”

Conclusion

You will gain the most insight from this lesson by taking this document into your private devotional room and reflecting on it during your prayer time, ask God to speak to your heart and shine a light in the areas of your life that you could improve and put these seven principles into practice. It’s not what we know that counts, it is the knowledge and spiritual insight that we implement in our daily life that leads to life transformation.

My prayers are that you will be the transformational leader that God has called you to be by implementing all that you are learning. You deserve a better spiritual and personal life in 2018. “Stay Fresh” by implementing & living biblical truths!!

References:

Adapted from the 4 C's from Josh McDowell, "Setting You Free to Make the Right Choices,"
Leaders Guide, 9-10.

Church Discipleship, Vol 11, No 1, the Navigators

Quote from General William Booth, Salvation Army Founder