

The Secrets of Spiritual Growth

by Roy Pointer

The secret to spiritual growth is surrender and pressing on to take hold of Christ, forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead.

Duration: 33:09

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Luke 9:23-24, John 1:9-13, John 3:3, Romans 8:9, Ephesians 2:1-5, Philippians 3:13-14

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Christian Maturity"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of not dwelling on the past but instead focusing on moving forward and growing in faith. He encourages the audience to be single-minded in their pursuit of God and to prioritize their love for Him, His people, and His work in the world. The preacher also discusses the need for spiritual growth, highlighting the importance of the new birth for the natural man and surrender for the carnal Christian. He warns against false professions of faith and lists 19 points to identify those who may not be truly experiencing growth in Christ.

Transcript

I want to speak tonight on the secrets of spiritual growth. It sounds rather, I don't know, sort of mystical, but I don't intend it to. One of the things in church growth studies that we do is kind of look very pragmatically at the church, rather matter-of-factly.

And there are various ways of classifying membership. As I think I've told you before, when I was with the Bible Society, we had 72 different kinds of membership on record. All sorts of different things were used to draw up what is a member of a church.

You'd be surprised how many involve the giving of money, but that's another interesting thing. I've read books, for example, that talk about membership in three categories, the nuclear or nucleus, the perimeter, and the unchurched sort of way of trying to see things. I came across a German sociologist, religious sociologist, and he talked about a nuclear, a modal, a marginal, and dormant.

All in German, of course. But it's another interesting way of looking at it. Well, maybe the best way to look at it is the way the scripture looks at it.

And I want to talk about three kinds of people, and they're found in the scripture. There is the psychikos, or natural man or woman, and you find that kind of person in 1 Corinthians 2, verse 14. And the apostle is

contrasting living in the spirit and living in the flesh, and talks about the man without the spirit does not accept the things that come from the spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

So that's sort of the person who is the natural man, psychikos. No spirit whatsoever, spiritually speaking. Just flesh, just soulish, just animal.

That's not to denigrate the human being outside of Christ, for we are the crown of God's creation. But as Christians, we realize that man is fallen. Man is less than he ought to be, because we have fallen away from God's grace.

We have found ourselves in a natural condition, and not in a spiritual condition. We'll talk more about that in a moment. So the scripture talks about psychikos, the natural man, the unbeliever, the person who is only once born, born according to the flesh.

Then the Bible talks about psychikos, psychos in the Greek meaning flesh, and this is the Christian who is dominated by fleshly desires and motives. The person who is a Christian, but is not fully surrendered to the Lord and to Christ, and therefore is living more in the flesh than in the spirit, and you find that too, the apostle talks about psychikos in 1 Corinthians 3. He says, you are still worldly, for since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? So this worldly person is not a spiritual person, but is still a believer, 1 Corinthians 3.3, psychikos. And then there's a third category, and this is a believer who is really living in the spirit, pneumatikos.

Pneuma is spirit, of course. Pneumatikos is the Christian who is living in the fullness of the spirit, who is yielded to Christ, who is manifesting the fruit and exercising the gifts of the spirit, and that would be in 1 Corinthians 3.1. Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual, but as worldly, mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it.

Contrast there is between the pneumatikos, the Christian who is spiritual, and psychikos, the Christian who is worldly. So there's these three categories, biblical categories, if you like, and the problem is this, it's very difficult to judge between psychikos and psychikos, between the person who is unsaved and the person who is saved, but not living the life. So you need to be careful, because you see, you may think that you're psychikos, you're a Christian but living fleshly, when in fact you could be psychikos, you could be totally unsaved.

That's the worst of all possible positions, isn't it? To think you're a Christian and not be one? Well, don't worry about the Greek, because we're going to work our way through it, and sort it all out, but I think you need to know that there is some difference in the Greek and the scripture. Do you want to grow, is really my question. Are you interested in spiritual growth? Well, I want to talk about the spiritual growth of the natural man, the spiritual growth of psychikos, the person who's an unbeliever.

If you're going to grow, if there's going to be any growth, there has to be birth, does there not? You know, I mean, you're not going to grow at all if you've never been born, and you need to be born again. What is the condition of the person who is unsaved? Well, we need to turn to Ephesians chapter 2. As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world, and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful natures and following its desires and thoughts.

Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. Now that's a very serious condition to be in, to be dead in your trespasses and sins and to be the object of God's wrath. Isn't it? That's a terrible condition to be in, but that's a condition of all natural mankind outside of Christ.

That's why Jesus says no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. You need to be born anew and born again. Now that comes out very clearly also in the first chapter of John's gospel, John 1 verses 9 to 13, where John the apostle is contrasting again children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision, or a husband's will, but born of God.

We need to be born of God. Only God can bring the dead to life. Only God can do that.

Only God can convict us of our sin. Only God can convince us of the truth of the gospel. They say in Northern Ireland a drunk knows the gospel as well as most preachers, and it's true.

People are well aware of what the gospel is, but they have never truly responded to it. They've never responded to the convicting work of the Spirit. They've never responded to the convincing truth that they've heard.

They've never been converted. So the first step in the growth of the natural man, the secret, if you like, for the natural man is to come to Christ, to be born again, to be born anew. And that's the greatest miracle of all, isn't it? To be born again.

Have you been born again? I mean, if I invited you to come up here and testify, could you testify and say, Yes, I've been born again. Now, in the scripture there are two analogies used of our relationship to Christ. One is a birth analogy, the new birth, and one is a kind of a marriage analogy.

You have become the bride of Christ, who is the bridegroom. Now, some of us can remember our conversion experience, and you'd say, Well, I know the day. It was on a Tuesday, or it was on a Wednesday.

You could tell me the date. You'd show me in the diary, and you'd say, Well, that's when I came to Christ. It's very vivid.

And that's very similar to a marriage analogy, isn't it? Most of us who are married know the day we got married. And as husbands, we're never allowed to forget it. Every year, you go to that little game.

You sort of pretend you've forgotten and you haven't. You hope you haven't. Anyway, so this goes along.

You remember the day. There are some Christians who can remember the day they came to Christ. But there are other Christians who can't.

They seem to have known Christ as long as they can remember. They didn't have a very dramatic experience. But they have been born again.

It's just as real. They may have grown up in a Christian home. It's just as real.

They've been born of the Spirit because they have life. You see? And that's very similar to the birth analogy. None of us can remember the day we were born.

I mean, you didn't sort of wake up on the day you were born and say, I've been born! Hooray! No, you just cried and someone slapped your back or whatever it was. And, you know, you don't remember. Do you? And some people cannot remember when they were born of the Spirit.

But the evidence is there. They're not dead in their trespasses and sins. They have been born again.

And it is the greatest and most wonderful of miracles. And that's the secret. It seems to me the first secret for spiritual growth.

If you're unsaved, you need to be saved. You need to be born again. And I wonder if there are any here tonight who are in that position where they know that they are psychikos.

They are simply natural men or women. They've never really been born again. Now, if that's your condition, the secret of spiritual growth is to run to Christ.

That's the first thing. Secondly, I want to speak about the spiritual growth of the carnal Christian, psychikos, the Christian who is dominated by the fleshly life, not fully surrendered to Christ. What an unhappy state to be in.

Jesus said that he had come to give life, and life in all its fullness, abundant life. And sadly, so many Christians are not living that abundant life because they're in this position of being psychikos, being fleshly, worldly. All their motives, all their attitudes are dominated by the flesh.

Charles Finney was one of the great revival preachers of an earlier century. And he has, I have a copy of it, Lectures to Professing Christians is one of his great sermons. It touched many, many lives and many were renewed and revived.

And he has a section where he talks about false professors. In other words, their profession of faith was false. And he lists 19.

That's a long sermon, obviously. 19 points, and this was just part of his sermon. I mean, I'm accused of being long-winded.

You have no idea what some of the old preachers were like, because they didn't have TV in those days. You didn't have to have a sound bite every second sentence. But anyway, this is what he says, Charles Finney.

He said, these false professors, these Christians who really aren't experiencing all they ought to experience, who really aren't growing in Christ. He said, there are those who have not given their possessions to God. You've not given your possessions over to God.

You still see everything you have as yours. And that's a problem. Did you not know that? You're not supposed to think like that.

That everything you have is yours. No, no, everything I have is at least to me, in a sense, it all belongs to the Lord. And if the Lord chooses to take it, or want it for any other purpose, I've got to give it.

It doesn't really belong to me. I'm sort of looking after it. Is that the way you think of your possessions? Those who do not honour God.

And he says there are many, many Christians who don't seek to honour God in their lives. Those who give God that which costs little or nothing. I wonder what you put in the offertory plate this Sunday.

Well, at least they're two dollar coins now. We'd be a bit better off with two dollar coins instead of one dollar coins. Or maybe it's 25 cents.

I don't know what the average giving of the average Anglican is in England, but it's pretty low. Well, of course, I suppose they think the Church of England has got all these investments, and all this and that and the other. It doesn't need the money.

But it does. And that's not the point. Whether the Church needs the money, is that you should be giving to God generously and cheerfully.

Because God always needs the money for the mission. That's what it's there for. Those who give one day to God and six days for themselves.

So you give the Lord one day out of seven. You're supposed to give the Lord seven. Those who will make no sacrifice for God.

Have you ever made a sacrifice for God? Have you ever gone without? This is Lent, folks. What are you going without this Lent? Still taking the same cookies you took before? Is there nothing that you've given up? Has anybody given anything up? Have you ever made any sacrifice for God? Those who give time and money grudgingly to God. He really did labour this old Charles Finney, didn't he? But anyway, those who seek to do as little as possible for God.

Those who put their families before God, or their businesses before God, or their own appetites before God. And my goodness, he spoke for five minutes on each of these things. Those who are motivated by self-interest, he says.

Those who talk about other matters than God. Have you ever met such people? You go to talk to them about the Lord, and they kind of look at you, so to say, and they're Christians. They'd rather talk about the weather or baseball.

Who knows what one could talk about baseball, for goodness sake. Now, cricket, that's different, but baseball. Those concerned for their own fame rather than God's fame.

Those who talk about other matters than the Lord. I've already mentioned that. Those not wanting to grow in Christ.

Those doing very little for God. Why is it we're always looking for people to get involved in the life and ministry of the Church? You all ought to be involved. Of course, most of you are, but all of you ought to be involved.

Everyone who has a gift, everyone who has a ministry, should be exercising that gift and exercising that ministry in the life of the Church. Those who seek happiness rather than usefulness in God's work. Those who are not concerned for the salvation of others.

My goodness. Does any of this fit? If the cap fits, wear it. Here's old Charles Finney's sermon.

Does any of it apply to us today? Because we're sarcoptic? We're fleshly and worldly? One of the things I love about the Salvation Army is that they have this penitential rail at the front. And you make an appeal. And you make an appeal for people to come to faith or come and get right with the Lord.

And it's a wonderful thing to see some of these senior Salvation Army officers coming straight up to the front. Leading their people. It's wonderful.

Brethren and sisters, what's the secret of growth? How do we get out of this awful, unhappy condition of being fleshly and worldly? I believe the answer is surrender. As I said this morning, we have to dethrone self. We have to hand over the rule and the throne of our lives to the Lord.

In all sorts of areas of our lives where we have to do that. And if some of you want to grow, that's what you need to do. And I can't put my finger on the area.

But the Spirit can. And if you're willing to surrender to the Lord, He will show you. He'll say, that's what I want to deal with.

That. And it may be that area of your life that you won't surrender, that is holding you back. And keeping you worldly and fleshly.

And until that's broken, you'll never move on with God. The Lord has probably touched it many times, addressed it many times. But you will not surrender.

You won't give up that relationship. You won't give up that particular behaviour. You will not give in.

And you are locked, spiritually, in this awful condition of being psychos. Well, let's assume you have surrendered. And you still want to go on.

What do you do about that? Well, I turn you to our text, which is Philippians 3. And here is the Apostle talking about growing in Christ. And from verses 12 to 16, he's very honest. He says, not that I have already obtained all this.

Or have already been made perfect. Sinless perfection doesn't exist on earth. It's something that comes when the kingdom comes.

Or when we go to the king. That's when we're without sin. So he says, I'm not perfect.

But I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. He's pressing on for salvation. He's pressing on for the fullness of his salvation.

Now, I'm going to assume. I'm going to assume that because it's Sunday evening. We're all out to a second service.

And so on and so forth. That we all really want to go on with God. That we're spiritual.

Now that could be the root of pride. So we mustn't. You know what I mean.

I'm going to assume that we want to go on with God. What have we got to do if we want to go on and on and on with God? Well, I think first of all in verse 12. We've got to be absolutely sure of Christ and our relationship with him.

And it saddens me sometimes when you talk to some Christians. And you talk about their relationship with the Lord. They don't have it as a settled question.

They do not have the assurance of their salvation. I think every believer should. They should have the assurance that they're saved.

They should have the assurance that when they die they're going to heaven. That is not presumption. That is Christian assurance.

And I ask you tonight, do you have that? That's a secret in spiritual growth. That you have this deep down conviction. That Jesus has taken hold of me.

One translation has, he's made me his own. I have absolutely no doubt whatsoever in my mind. That the Lord Jesus got hold of me.

By the scrap of the neck. And has made me his own. I have absolutely no doubt about that.

When I was 23 years old, I knocked on the pastor's door. And I said, I must accept Christ. And he said, kneel there.

And I knelt. I have no doubt about it. It's a settled question with me.

It was a settled question with the apostle. And then he says in verse 13, Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do.

This is all of salvation. Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead. Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead.

I press on. No backward glances. Do you ever want to look back? Well sometimes, I mean, I can look back and I think, that beautiful lobster potting dingy I had.

You know, with a little seagull outboard motor on the back. And those beautiful mornings when I could sort of push off from the shore. And chug, chug, chug, chug, chug out to the line of pots.

And the sea bass would be jumping. And breaking the surface. Beautiful spring morning off the coast.

Oh my goodness. And you kind of, you look, look. No, no, no, don't look back.

Because as you look back, you also remember not only the lovely things, but there are some things in the past that were not so good. And the devil likes to remind you of those things, doesn't he? He kind of accuses you and says, look back at that. And you think, no, no, no, don't look back.

Press on, look ahead. And if you want to grow in Christ, you're going to keep moving forward, not backwards. Having set your hand to the plow, don't look back.

Look ahead. Looking to Jesus. Moving forward.

That's the straight line. You ever seen a plow? When they keep looking back, it's like this. No, you look ahead.

The plowman fixes on a mark and plows a straight line. And you have to fix your eyes on Jesus and keep on moving forward. Not backwards.

Sometimes in counselling you have people who cannot move beyond something that's happened in the past. They literally cannot do it. And sometimes I say to them, look, why don't you write out this thing.

Maybe a list of things. And then you write across it. If we confess our sins, 1 John 1.9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

And then, burn it. Make sure you've got a metal bin somewhere or the sink. But you burn it.

Or screw it up, tear it up, flush it down the loo. You need to realise that what's behind you has been dealt with if you've confessed it. And I had someone come to see me recently and I said do that and they hadn't done it and I made them do it.

And so, we did it. And they wrote out a prayer of repentance, asking God's forgiveness, mentioning the problem. And then we wrote across it.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. And then I made sure they flushed it down the loo. Gone.

See, sometimes God has forgotten it, but we won't forget it. God's sort of saying, well, what are you on about? But we keep reminding and remembering, especially as Satan accuses us. No, no, no.

If we're going to move forward, if we're going to grow, no backward glances, forgetting what is behind me, pressing on, straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal. And here, I think, thirdly, the Apostle is saying that you've got to be single-minded, running the race, going for the goal. I mean, you Canadians know how to do that.

You play basketball and you run and there you are. I don't know how on earth you do it. You throw this ball and it goes to the net.

It's incredible. This tiny little hole. And this great big ball and it goes right through.

It's amazing. But you Canadians seem to know how to do it. And there you are.

You press on and go for the goal. Single-minded surrender. You establish your priorities and go for them.

What are the priorities? I think there are three priorities I've seen worked out in the philosophy of one church, and very powerfully so. You should love God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength. And that was prayed.

You should love God's people. Do you love one another? That's a new commandment, said Jesus, that I give to you, that you love one another. And we should love God's work in the world and be committed to it.

So there's a surrendered single-mindedness for the spiritual ones who want to go on with God. So the secrets of spiritual growth, for the natural man, you need the new birth. For the carnal Christian, you need to surrender to God.

Put up the white flag and say, Lord, I'm not holding on to anything else any longer. Lord, let the spotlight of your love search my heart, test my life, and put it right. And then for the spiritual believer still wanting to go

on with God, lay hold of the assurance of your faith.

No backward glances. No, no, no. I'm never going to look backwards.

I'm going to go forward, straining towards what is ahead. I press on towards the goal. I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Brethren and sisters, that's where we're heading. I want you to imagine that there's a penitential rail in front here. Can you imagine it? A place to kneel.

Well, maybe as Baptists, a place to sit. Some Baptists do kneel, you know. Maybe in the privacy of our own rooms.

But there is a place to sit. And as we sing our final hymn, I'm going to invite you to come and to sit at the front if you want to get right with God. Our final hymn is 260.

Just as I am without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me. 260. And you come forward as we sing this hymn.

If you want to know the Lord, or if you want to get right with the Lord, you just come and sit in the front. As I am without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me, and that thou bidst me come. And as I am without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me, And as I am without one plea, but that thou bidst me come.

And as I am without one plea, but that thou bidst me come. And as I am without one plea, but that thou bidst me come. If you want to get the day to come, just come and sit at the front.

It's a little thing to ask, but it's a very important thing in your own spiritual walk and growth. As we sing these last two verses of this hymn, you please come. Just as I am, O wretched mind, sight-wretched, sleeping on the vine, Yea, all I need in thee, my guide, O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I ever will to see, I'll to welcome God and cleanse, relieve, Because thy promise I believe, O Lamb of God, I come, I come. Brethren and sisters, I think we should all be at the front, don't you? Because we all want to grow. We all want to move ahead with God.

And we're not going to be able to do that unless we allow the Lord to deal with the things that are holding us back in our lives. Just think on it. And if this is the right place for you to be, then you just make your way here before everyone leaves.

Just come quietly and sit in the front. Maybe just to be quiet. Maybe just to seek the Lord by yourself.

And then to have someone come and pray with you. Why don't you come? Now let's say the grace together. Eyes open or closed as you see fit.

Mindful of one another. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.

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