

Four Planes of the Spiritual Life

by Watchman Nee

The four planes of the spiritual life are the evangelistic plane, the revival plane, the path of the cross, and the plane of spiritual warfare, each representing a stage of growth and maturity in the Christian life.

Scripture: Luke 10:19, Romans 6:4, Galatians 3:2, Ephesians 6:12, Philippians 3:10

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

Watchman Nee discusses the four planes of the spiritual life, emphasizing the progression from the evangelistic plane of salvation to the revival plane of the Holy Spirit, then to the path of the cross, and finally to the plane of spiritual warfare. Each stage represents a deeper understanding and experience of faith, requiring believers to actively engage in their spiritual growth and resist the powers of darkness. Nee highlights the importance of maturity in faith, as believers must learn to discern and combat spiritual adversaries while helping others at their respective stages. He warns against passivity in surrendering to God, urging believers to take an active stance in their spiritual battles. Ultimately, the journey through these planes equips believers to minister effectively to others in their spiritual needs.

Transcript

(The following is an excerpt from *Life Out of Death*, a book by Jessie Penn-Lewis. It was originally published by The Overcomer Literature Trust, Parkston, Poole, Dorset, England.)

There are four planes--broadly speaking--in the spiritual life of the believer, and of the Christian worker: The first plane we may call the "evangelistic" plane; that is, the plane where the soul knows the new birth; knows that he has eternal life in Christ; where he becomes a soul winner, preaches salvation from the penalty of sin, and is used to lead others to Christ; where the entire objective is winning souls for Christ; where he is faithful in proclaiming the gospel of salvation in Christ.

Then there is the second plane, which may be called the "revival" plane; or the stage in personal experience where the believer receives the fulness of the Holy Spirit, learns to know Him and to obey Him; to rely upon Him and to look to Him to work as he co-operates with Him, and is used to lead others into the experience of the fulness of the Spirit.

Then there is the third plane, which we may call the plane of the "path of the cross", where the believer experimentally apprehends his position in Romans 6 in fellowship with Christ's death; is brought into "conformity" to His death (Philippians 3:10); he learns the fellowship of His sufferings, and is led to walk in

the path of the Cross in every detail of practical life. Here the believer is able to interpret to others the way of the Cross, and to lead others to know Romans 6 and 2 Corinthians 4:10-12 in experience.

The fourth plane is the plane of spiritual warfare. It is really the "ascension" plane, where the believer knows his union with Christ, seated with Him "far above all principality and power"; and where, in service, he is in aggressive warfare against the powers of darkness; learns to have spiritual discernment to detect the working of the devil; and learns the authority of Christ over all the power of the enemy. (Luke 10:19.)

Or to put it concisely--the first is the plane of salvation, or the new life; the second is the plane of the Spirit; the third is the plane of victory over sin; the fourth is the plane of victory over the powers of darkness.

The individual believer, if he goes forward in the Christian life with God, is generally--not always--led just in this order also. First, he receives salvation; second, he receives the Holy Ghost; third he is led along the path of the Cross; fourth, he walks in the path of conflict and victory, resulting in "power" over all the power of the enemy. The individual worker, also, finds he is used in these four planes of service. First, he is used to lead others to Christ; second, he is used to lead them into the fulness of the Spirit; third, he is used to interpret to them the path of the Cross; and fourth, to discern the devices and workings of the devil, and to have power over "all the power of the enemy", through union with Christ on the throne.

Madame Guyon truly says that in every plane of the spiritual life there is a beginning, working out, and a consummation of the life in that degree, followed by a passage into the next plane, where there is again a beginning, a working out, a consummation. In each plane you appear to learn the very same lessons over again, but they are all being learned in a deeper degree. For instance, in the first plane you learn the way of faith in Christ as Saviour, and then you have to learn to exercise faith again in the next plane, and again in the next. It is just as hard to learn the lesson of bare faith in the fourth plane as in the first, and yet, as you look back, you can see the hard lessons of the first plane are now quite simple and easy.

Further, it is true that, speaking generally, it often takes years to get through each plane! When you pass into a new plane of the spiritual life, it is often with some great conscious "blessing". A God-given experience of fulness in Christ, which may be described as a "taste" of what God has for you in that plane in its consummation. For instance, you get a revelation of the ascension life, seated with Christ in the heavenly places, and the joy and light of it is so real, that you think you will never come down again to the lower planes you now leave behind you, but in a brief while of weeks, or months, the "conscious" blessing--lasting according to the extent of the revelation and its power--apparently disappears, and you perhaps struggle to regain what you think you have lost. Now you have to fight by bare faith, to hold the ground you have taken. Then follows what may be called a "tunnel" experience, when you go through test upon test; in which, perhaps, you may think you fail, but through all you find there is advancement, and final emergence into the full consummation of that specific plane of the spiritual life, where you understand the way of abiding; for in the working into you of that life by the "tunnel" experience, God has removed what stands in the way of the permanent abiding in that stage of the knowledge of Him. (See Romans 5:2-5, A.V. and R.V.)

But let us remember, if God gives you a message which He means you to take hold of, He holds you, even when you appear to lose it. His Word given to you lays hold of you. That word has divine life and energy in it, and it can grip you, and hold you to it. God requires your co-operation, of course, and you must actively take the word by faith; but the power is in the Word itself when God has spoken it to you. If the Lord has given you the word "power over the power of the enemy", you have to co-operate by saying in response, "I

choose and accept it, Lord, but I have no power to hold it; the Word must hold me."

And in truth you often apparently lose it, so that it goes right away from you, but if you go on steadily in bare faith, you come at last through the tunnel working of God, to the consummation point, and then what looked like a literal impossibility to you when God gave you the light, you find has been wrought into you as part of your very life; assimilated and incorporated into your spiritual being.

When a believer has pressed on with God faithfully from plane to plane, and has reached the sphere of warfare and victory over the powers of the air, then he should be able to lead others into any of the degrees of blessing they need; but, usually, when the soul is in a certain stage, and not arrived at its full consummation, he can only help others in the same stage, speaking out of his present light and experience. It is not until the consummation point is reached that the believer has liberty and facility in dealing with others in planes which he himself has left behind. In the transitional stage of each plane, you can only give the vision you have, so that your ministry seems limited to those who are at the same stage. You interpret to them what you, and they, are experiencing. But when you are through that plane, it seems as if you are able to minister to souls at any degree as they may need it.

Therefore you must never be disturbed if any one says that your "message" did not help them at all, or possibly your message was "above their heads". The fact is, you were obliged to give it, for you were not free enough for anything else, and you ministered only to a certain number of souls who could be helped by that message.

What about others, you ask? Remember you cannot meet the needs of all until you have passed through the stages of all. A worker needs to be very matured in the spiritual life to have light and truth for "all saints", just as Paul had, and the other apostles.

When the believer has passed through these "planes"--a matter of years, more or less--and he reaches the plane of power over the forces of darkness, in its fullest degree, then he is in the "apostolic" stage, with sufficient facility, and equipment, and knowledge, and liberty, from his own experience of the Word of Righteousness (Hebrews 5:13), to be able to handle the Word of God as a steward, and to minister it to others at their various degrees. When you become matured and ripened, then you do not speak from what you yourself are at the moment experiencing, but you are able to use the Scripture of truth as an armoury, and be "furnished completely" for every good work, able to wield, or apply the Word of God to each soul. This is real equipment, and ripeness of maturity, and fitness for service in the power of the Holy Ghost.

What is also needed is that Christians should know that the victory of Calvary over the powers of darkness is required to be apprehended by them in every stage of the spiritual life, and every plane of experience. (1) The evangelist needs to know it, because to win souls to Christ, he must learn how to bind the devil holding souls, and therefore the truth of victory over the powers of darkness as declared in the Word of God, is part of the evangelist's armour and equipment. (2) Those who receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit need to know the victory over the powers of darkness, so as to be able to detect the counterfeits, and to refuse them. (3) Those who go on in the path of the Cross equally need to know the devices of the deceiving spirits, because they will interfere with them at every step onward in their knowledge of the Cross, and try to mix their workings with the work of God in every degree. In fact, the truths about the powers of darkness need to be known in every plane, and at each stage of the spiritual life, according to the measure and need.

But the urgent work to be done now is to meet the need of the advanced ranks of the Church of Christ. Those who can, "by reason of use", exercise their spiritual senses, and are able to "eat" and assimilate the "solid food" which is for those of full age; as well as to give the same spiritual food in "milk" form to the babes, so that they may grow.

In helping others, if you find that believers do not understand the meaning of the prayer-warfare, you should ask them if they know anything about the Cross, and the position of death with Christ, according to Romans 6; for they must know the death to sin, and to the world, before they can understand the spiritual warfare. If they do not know the power of the Cross, you must go further back, and ask them if they know the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, for the power to know experimentally the fellowship of Christ's death is given by the Holy Spirit. If they do not know the baptism of the Holy Spirit, you must go further back still, and ask them if they possess the new life in Christ at all. How can a soul receive the fulness of the Holy Spirit, if it does not know Christ as a Saviour, and is not born from above into the kingdom of Christ? We must as workers be able to lead souls back from point to point to the place of need, and recognize the four grades, or planes, of growth in dealing with them.

For these who already know the Baptism of the Spirit, and the path of the Cross, the pressing need is light on the warfare with Satan; but another need on a wider scale is the experimental knowledge of the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, for a vast number of believers do not know this, and the two-fold aspect of the Cross: therefore they cannot understand what we mean by "warfare" and the need of the discerning of spirits. It is not enough to proclaim victory over the powers of darkness, you must lead the children of God to know the Cross in its relation to believers. The warfare of Ephesians 6 is a spiritual warfare, and only through the death of the Cross is the believer brought into the spiritual realm, and the conflict there.

Many Christians are perplexed over receiving the Holy Spirit because they think they only have the proof of having done so, if they have manifestations of His presence: so on this subject many questions arise. The Scriptures make it clear that you receive Him by faith (Galatians 3:2, 3), but there is a succeeding work to be done in real surrender to obey Him, and the putting of all obstacles out of the way of His fullest working; the hindrances must be removed to His working through the believer, and the wrong things in the life put away, as revealed progressively by Him.

When does the special need of light on the powers of darkness and their workings now come in? All over the world there are large numbers of believers definitely and clearly preaching full assurance of salvation in Christ. Then there are an increasing number of believers who really know the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, and are in the "Revival" plane, or the plane of knowing the Holy Spirit, and co-working with Him. Again there are others--a smaller company--knowing the Holy Spirit, who have really pressed on in the power of the Spirit to follow the Lamb of Calvary in the path of the Cross.

Now speaking generally, these last-named believers are blocked, because they have no glimmer of anything beyond this. They have thought that they have simply to go on to the end in the path of the Cross--in the Spirit of the Lamb. Meanwhile the powers of darkness have been coming in like a flood to the Church of Christ, blocking and hindering the work of God on every side. The message needed by these souls who know the fellowship of the Cross--or the crucified life--is the knowledge of the aggressive war upon the powers of darkness. The call to these is, "Arise, in the new life of Christ, and in the equipment of the Holy Ghost--whom you have already known to lead you unto death--and lay hold of the Victory of Christ, and take the aggressive against the foe." Having died to the old fleshly life of activity--the soulish life energy--having died to the world, and become separated unto Christ; these are the souls who

need to see their union with Christ in the ascension life, and His authority over all the power of the enemy.

Here we must point out a cause of danger in the life of many who know the path of the Cross. They have learned the power of the Holy Ghost, and the path of the Cross; they have understood that they were to "follow the Lamb"; to submit to the will of God; and they have followed on in that path faithfully, until now they may have unknowingly gone on a point too far. Their "surrender" may have become "passivity"--i.e., a passive condition of mind, and sometimes of all their faculties--which is not according to God. Having ceased to "resist" in the "flesh" they have sunk into a passive submission to all things around them, not only to the "will of God", but to the will of Satan, and failed in their attitude of resistance "in the spirit" to the spiritual foe. Their surrender to "the will of God" became, or has become unconsciously, a passive-submission to Satan. There has undoubtedly come upon the Church a heavy pressure of the powers of darkness, and many souls who know the Cross are failing to detect between the "will of God" and the "will of Satan"; and they are presenting no resistance, and no solid front against the adversary and his hosts. Surrender to God has lapsed into "passivity", or passive endurance of everything. They have only the view of the Lamb, and not the Lion-LAMB--the Lamb who submits to death, but not the LION-LAMB who triumphs over the devil.

These souls must arise out of their passive condition, and in the power of the Spirit go forward into aggressive warfare against the powers of darkness. They must use their renewed will in active co-operation with God. They must take the aggressive with victory-prayer against every hindrance that the devil puts in their way. They should march forward claiming the victory of the Cross over all the power of the enemy. These are the souls who, because of their baptism into death, and consequent cessation of fleshly and soulish energy, may receive, or "take", and exercise the "gifts of the Spirit". Whatever gift is necessary for their service in this warfare, they may take as part of the provided equipment of the Spirit for this hour of need.

Note also that souls in each plane can help and lead others in the plane behind them, but they cannot push any one forward into the plane before them, nor fully understand or "judge" others in the plane ahead of them. In the path ahead there are conditions, realms of knowledge, points of danger, only known to those in that degree, and unseen and not understood by souls in earlier degrees. The enemy knows this, and oft-times pushes a "babe" in the second plane to resist truths only understood further on. Yet the truths suited to planes three and four must be spoken for those who need them.

Lastly, let it be distinctly stated that the description of these degrees in the spiritual life of a believer is given from the experimental, or "subjective" aspect, and not from the judicial or positional side of truth, wherein a "babe in Christ" may be said to be as "complete in Him" from the moment of conversion, as at the end of life. A child grows from the baby-stage, degree after degree, into manhood. (Philippians 3:13, 14.)

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