

Can I really change my life?

Introduction: Our weaknesses and immaturities cause us a lot of suffering. We miss out on many good things. We know what we ought to be and do, but we keep falling down in the same ways. We want to overcome our failings and grow strong in the Lord. But we may have tried and failed. Some of us may have despaired of ever overcoming the problems in our character, personality or relationship with God.

God's word assures you that you can change. You can grow more and more into God's wholeness and abundant life. This course may deal with deep and sensitive parts of our lives, but the results are worth it. Keynote scriptures for the course:

John 1:12 (RSV) - "To all who received him....he gave power to become children of God..."

Matthew 5:6 - "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."

John 7:37-39 - "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him. By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive."

2 Corinthians 3:17, 18 - "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

1. If I have failed before, why should I be able to grow now? You can, because you may:

- A. Understand more things now.
- B. Have stronger motives than before.
- C. Get better help from others than before.
- D. Be closer to God than before.

God's word contains wisdom to heal any problem or weakness in your spiritual life. Regardless of how you may have messed up your life, or of what your failings are, there is a road from where you stand to wholeness, joy and peace in the Lord, if you are willing to submit to his Lordship and walk the road he gives.

2. God's word promises that we can grow. It speaks of:

- A. Leaving the old life and beginning the new.
 - 1) Being born again - John 3:3-5.

- 2) Becoming a new creation - 2 Corinthians 5:17.
- 3) "Dying" to the old self and living to Christ - Romans 6:1-14.
- 4) Taking off the old and putting on the new - Colossians 3:5-14; Ephesians 4:22-32; 5:1-21.
- 5) Flawed vessels remade by the potter - Jeremiah 18:1-10.

B. Becoming more and more like Jesus.

- 1) Looking at Jesus and being changed into his likeness - 2 Corinthians 3:17, 18.
- 2) The fruit of the Holy Spirit borne in us - Galatians 5:22, 23.
- 3) Restoring of God's image in the new creation - Colossians 3:10; Ephesians 4:22-24.
- 4) Participation in the divine nature - 2 Peter 1:4-7.
- 5) We are commanded to grow, and this means we can - 2 Peter 3:18.

C. Refreshing help and encouragement.

- 1) Ministries given to help us grow like Christ - Ephesians 4:11-13.
- 2) Encouragement from other Christians - Hebrews 10:24, 25; Romans 15:1-3.
- 3) Breaking the cycle of helplessness and failure - Romans 7 and 8.
- 4) God's law written on our hearts (willing obedience) - Jeremiah 31:31-34.
- 5) Rest from wearying, unnecessary burdens - Matthew 11:28-30.
- 6) Release from bondage to sins - Luke 4:18, 19.
- 7) Killing sin through the Spirit's help - Romans 8:13.
- 8) Abundant life - John 10:10.
- 9) God will finish what he has begun in us - Philippians 1:6.

3. Some principles of spiritual change and growth:

- A. Spiritual growth is gradual, not instantaneous - Mark 4:26-29; 2 Corinthians 3:17, 18.
- B. Trials create perseverance, steadiness and maturity - James 1:2, 3; Romans 5:3, 4; and cleanse away hindrances while increasing well - John 15:1, 2; Hebrews 12:5-11; Malachi 3:3.
- C. Choices make up habits. Habits make up character. Growth, therefore, depends on the right choices in small things daily.

- D. Change thought-life and you will change behavior - Proverbs 4:23; Philippians 4:8. But also change in behavior will change inner feelings.
 - E. The more you grow, the more you can grow. The more you neglect spiritual growth, the harder it becomes to grow - Mark 4:24, 25. You can move back toward true spiritual life no matter where you are. But the more a person is hardened and accustomed to sin and neglect, the more difficult it is to come back. Thus the importance of deciding now, taking necessary steps and removing all possible hindrances - Luke 15:17-19; Hebrews 12:1.
 - F. Faithfulness in little things leads to faithfulness in great things - Luke 16:10-12; 19:17.
 - G. There is spiritual examination, diagnosis and treatment, just as there is physical. One needs to examine his own life, and he may need to prayerfully discuss his spiritual problems with an elder, teacher, or trusted, mature Christian - 2 Corinthians 13:5; Hebrews 4:12; Psalm 139:23, 24; James 5:16; Mark 10:17-21.
4. Some things you must have in order to grow:
- A. Birth. Have you truly been "born again," "born of water and the Spirit?" Are you really in fellowship with God who is life? John 3:3-5; Acts 2:38; 1 John 1:7, 9.
 - B. Right environment, conducive to growth - Hebrews 10:24, 25; 1 Corinthians 15:33.
 - C. Right food and drink - Hebrews 5:11-14; 6:1-3; Revelation 22:17; John 6:35; Philippians 4:8; Psalm 119:97,103.
 - D. Hygiene - Mark 7:20-23; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; 2 Timothy 2:20-22.
 - E. Exercise - Hebrews 5:14; Matthew 7:24-27.
5. Things that oppose growth:
- A. "Desire of the flesh, desire of the eyes, and pride of life" - 1 John 2:15-17; Galatians 5:17; James 4:4-10; Romans 8:5-8.
 - B. Hard hearts, shallow commitment, divided interests - Luke 8:4-15.
6. Some characteristics of a mature person:
- A. A concern for inward, not just outward things; for being, not just doing - Luke 17:20; 1 Samuel 16:7; Luke 11:37-42.
 - B. A redemptive, servant spirit, - others-centered, not self-centered - Philippians 2:5-11; Romans 15:1-3.
 - C. Able to sacrifice some things in order to have more important things. Not always wanting to "have the cake and eat it too."
 - D. Able to take responsibility for one's own failings - not always blaming circumstances, other people or some reason outside self.

- E. Able to accept some reasonable risk in order to have what is good - Luke 19:11-26.
- F. Able to live by principles, not just outward rules.
- G. Able to rule one's feelings rather than being ruled by them; able to do what one doesn't want to.

7. Some goals in this study:

- A. Clearing the past of guilt and broken relationships.
- B. Resolving doubts that weaken our faith and keep us from acting.
- C. Overcoming bondage to addictions, pleasures, wrong attitudes, etc.
- D. Crucifying the old self so that conflict lessens and we can really obey God.
- E. Developing self-discipline so that our opposing desires do not make us unproductive.
- F. Learning to rule feelings rather than being ruled by them.
- G. Developing healthy self-esteem so that we can love others and function well.
- H. Decisiveness, goal-setting, so that we have direction and action.
- I. Recognizing true values so that we are not deceived into wasting our lives.
- J. Setting Kingdom priorities so that what is most important is accomplished.
- K. Keeping right relationships with people; overcoming conflicts.
- L. Choosing the right mate (one of life's most crucial choices).
- M. Following God's guidance; how to determine his will.
- N. Building doctrinal foundations, knowing what to believe.

Conclusion: Though we all have limitations because of heredity and past environment, we also have gifts. We have so much room within our limits to grow, that no one ever reaches his or her full potential. Any one of us who decides to can have a strong, joyful, abundant life beyond anything he or she has imagined. Life can be very, very good.

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