

Hindrances to Growth

One of the greatest hindrances is a lack of discipline. In I Timothy 4:7,8 serving the Lord is compared with exercise. It says, “But refuse profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For bodily exercise profits little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.”

Exercise in both the physical and spiritual realm demands discipline. Here Paul is saying that bodily exercise profits little, or for a little time. In other words, it has temporary benefits that concern this life only. But “godliness is profitable unto all things having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.” So a person who exercises himself unto godliness is a person who is going to be benefited, not only here on this earth, but in heaven also, because his obedience is going to result in his having rewards in heaven.

A person should make a habit of doing the right thing day by day. And a really helpful thing for creating habits is something I refer to as predetermined dedication. Predetermined dedication is when a person already makes up his mind, or determines, what he is going to do before an event even takes place. For instance, we as believers are commanded to study the Bible. Let’s say the time comes that you know you should sit down and study the Bible, but you are distracted, and you find other things that you would rather do. If you’ve predetermined that you are going to do the right thing no matter what, then you can set aside those other things and study.

Suppose you’ve already determined where you are going to go on a trip, and you have only so long to get there. You’ve already looked at the map and know exactly how to get there, so you’re not going to be pulling off the road when you see a sign pointing in a different direction and start thinking, “what should I do?” You’ve already made up your mind where you’re going, so you don’t let anything divert you from your plans. That’s the kind of attitude you have to have about serving the Lord if you really want to make it. You have to make up your mind what your goals are and apply yourself to them.

Some people have a lazy or undisciplined mind so when they go to study the Bible, even though they have good intentions, they find it hard to concentrate, and many

times, they will find something else to do. What a person like this should do is set aside time and make sure that time won't be interrupted so he can concentrate as much as possible.

Also, if you're the type of person whose mind keeps wandering, just keep reading until you are concentrating. Maybe instead of spending just one hour studying, you should make it three. You see, just as the physical body has to be disciplined in order to ever be in good shape, so your mind has to be disciplined also. Another thing that has been helpful to some people is reading out loud. By reading aloud some people can concentrate better on what they're reading.

And at this point I just want to say that I have known a lot of people who have had really serious problems in this area, and they have found victory in their lives, so please don't get discouraged. The Lord wants you to know and understand His Word, and He will be helping you; but like everything in the Christian life, it involves doing your part. If we do our part, then the Lord will do His part, so please don't get discouraged.

The next point I want to go through is the second greatest hindrance that I've seen to a person's reaching his full potential for the Lord, and that is discouragement. You see, serving the Lord is something from which you don't necessarily get immediate benefits. It's just like if you were a farmer and you were to plant your field, you wouldn't go out the next day and start looking for a harvest. There is a time period between sowing and reaping. But if you take care of your field like you should, and weather conditions are good, then you are going to be reaping the benefits.

Well, there is also a spiritual law that whatever you sow, you're going to reap. But as in the physical realm, there is always a time period between sowing and reaping, so it is in the spiritual realm. The Lord promises us that He will give us the desires of our heart. In Psalm 37:4, it says, "Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart." That is a promise. If we put God first in our lives, then we're going to be reaping the benefits of having the desires of our heart.

Don't think that God will forget the work that you do for Him. He's not going to forget it; you are going to be rewarded. And that's why Paul wrote, in Galatians 6:9, "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we

faint not.” We will be reaping in due season as long as we don’t faint, or get discouraged, and stop producing the works.

If a farmer were to stop midway in watering his crops or in taking care of his crops, then it is his fault that he is not going to be reaping the harvest. And the same holds true in the spiritual realm. There are so many benefits that God has for us if we are His obedient children. But we can hinder ourselves from reaping those benefits if we stop doing the works, because then, of course, the Lord will have nothing to reward us for.

Another incentive that God has for us so that we won’t get discouraged is crowns. You see there is actually a difference between having treasures in heaven and having crowns. In I Corinthians 3:8, it says that God is going to reward every man according to his own labor. And in verses 11-15, the judgment seat of Christ is described. All work done for the Lord is compared to gold, silver and precious stones. Let’s say a person were to serve the Lord for five years of his life; he would have stored up a lot of gold, silver and precious stones in heaven. Now what if that person were to stop serving the Lord, and then, after say a year’s time, were to die, would he lose out on the gold, silver and precious stones that he had laid up? No, but, what he would lose out on is the crowns.

The Lord knows our weaknesses, and that is why He promised us not only rewards in heaven, but also crowns. Crowns are an extra incentive to keep us going. You see, you can’t lose your rewards in heaven, as far as gold, silver and precious stones go, but you can lose your crowns, because crowns are given to people that keep on being faithful until the end.

I Corinthians 9:24,25 bring up this point. They say, “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receives the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that strives for the mastery is temperate in all things.” (This means that every person that aims on winning an award exercises self control in all things.) “Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible.”

Olympic athletes, back in Paul’s time, used to eat special food, stay away from all alcoholic beverages and exercise self control so that they would be in good condition to win the race. If we want to be crowned by the Lord, then we also are going to have to exercise self control in our lives and run across that finish line, not

stop midway in our Christian lives. It is impossible to be crowned that way. We have to run across that finish line.

The last point that I want to cover which is a major hindrance to people's ever reaching their full potential in the Christian life is being side tracked. I brought up that serving the Lord many times doesn't result in immediate benefits and that many times there is a time period that you have to wait to be rewarded.

Sometimes what a person sees as immediately rewarding can distract him from his goals. While a person is serving the Lord, he can be distracted by the glitter of this world. Another thing that can be distracting are one's problems. Christ brought up both these things in Matthew 13:22, where it says, "The care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful." Many people have the attitude, "Well, let me take care of my problems now, and then later, when I don't have these problems, I'll serve the Lord." This is totally illogical when it comes to spiritual reasoning because when you serve the Lord with your problems, you are putting yourself in the position where God can take care of your problems and you won't have to worry about them.

And please notice that Christ also brought up the deceitfulness of riches. A lot of people have the idea that money will bring them happiness. But one of the wealthiest men in the United States, who lived like someone on a limited income, said that money owned him. He was a slave to the actual desire for money.

For most people, the accumulation of wealth increases their greed rather than their satisfaction. It is like the man that is dying of thirst out in the desert who sees an oasis and puts forth all his energy and strength to get there, only to find out that it is a mirage. That is how the things of this world are; they don't satisfy the soul. They were never intended to.

Now don't misunderstand me, I'm not saying that there is anything wrong with having money. In I Timothy 6:17-19 Paul doesn't condemn people that are rich, he just tells them not to put their trust in their riches. He tells them to do good and to use their money well so that they will be laying up treasures in heaven. But in I Timothy 6:9 he condemns people who, instead of having their desire on serving the Lord, have their minds set on being rich.

Now how do you know what you're placing first in your life, whether it is the desire for wealth, or the Lord? Well, it is very simple. What do you think about? Where do your priorities lie? Are you satisfied with what you have? That is very important.

It says, in I Timothy 6:8, "And having food and raiment let us be therewith content." Are you content? If you are a servant of the Lord, you will be content. If the Lord sees fit to bless you with money, that's fine. And if he sees fit that you shouldn't have abundance of wealth, that's fine too. If you are His servant, then you can trust Him with your life. You have confidence that He knows what He's doing.

I haven't covered all the things that are hindrances to reaching your full potential for the Lord, but I have brought up some of the major ones. I hope that if you recognize yourself in anything that's been covered, you'll judge it, correct it and get on that road because you have so much to gain and nothing to lose.