

**Articles and Sermons :: Free to Make Progress by K.P. Yohannan**

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I was stunned and amazed to no end when I read the 19-page letter a man wrote me. He not only blamed me for all the mess he had made of his life, but he also pronounced severe judgment and terrible curses on me from God and the devil.

Never in my life had I received anything so full of poisonous hatred. The most incredible thing was that I had never met the man in my life. I had no clue of the situation to which he referred.

Since he had the audacity to make me responsible for all his tragedies and setbacks, I sat down to write him a fitting defense to his wild accusations. But just as I finished, I asked myself, "What am I doing? I tore up my letter and threw it away."

Then I took an aerogram and wrote him a one-sentence reply: "My dear brother, no one on earth can destroy you, not even God; only you can destroy yourself."

You see, the man's real problem was that he never searched his own heart for the root cause of his crisis. Instead, he believed that if I straightened up, his problem would go away and he would be happy and successful in his endeavors.

Whose fault is it when our progress is stalling?

This man is certainly not alone in thinking he can blame people around him for his lack of success, peace, comfort, happiness or spirituality. That's why a husband looks for his wife to change and a wife wants her husband to shape up.

Wanting to feel good and grow spiritually by changing everybody else becomes a vicious cycle. We are convinced that our progress depends on their compliance. We seldom stop and honestly look at ourselves.

It is true that others can be a source of trials, disappointment and challenge, but we cannot blame them for our own lack of spiritual vitality. That's a matter of our hearts, and not of outward circumstances.

In fact, throughout Christian history those believers who went through immense trials, horrendous persecution and martyrdom were the very ones who carried the Christian faith forward. They gained their spiritual strength and endurance in the midst of adversity, and their faith was refined as gold through fire. In order to grow spiritually and become faithful until death, they did not depend on people around them to change. Even in chains, they were free to make progress in pursuing God.

The truth is, no one person can hinder our spiritual growth or destroy us if we walk with the Lord and put our faith in Him. He will be our shield and defender just as He promised. Even God cannot destroy us, if we have trusted in Jesus as our Savior and our hearts are completely His. He will eternally abide by His own Word that says "...whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Ultimately, I am the only one who can destroy me. By my own choice to reject Jesus as my Savior, I can send myself to hell. As a follower of Christ, if I violate God's principles, I will bring destruction upon my marriage, my home, my work and myself. And if I don't walk by faith according to the Scripture, I can prevent God from fulfilling His promises toward me.

How do we detect the real hindrance and remove it?

Because he saw the real hindrance to their spiritual growth, the apostle Paul advised the self-centered Corinthian Christians to examine and judge themselves. Instead of blaming others, we too ought first to search our own hearts when we make no progress in our Christian walk or are surrounded by destruction.

You see, our hearts often appear so innocent to us that we don't suspect our troubles could be self-inflicted. The Bible, on the other hand, assesses the nature of our hearts as shockingly criminal: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and d

esperately wicked; who can know it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind ..." (Jeremiah 17:9-10).

This verse leaves no doubt that our own heart investigation is unreliable. Only the Lord can tell us the truth and help us to see ourselves as we are. That's why each of us needs to follow David's example—coming in humility to the Lord, asking Him to perform the examination: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23-24).

God was always faithful to point out a sin or a wrong attitude in David's heart that compromised his relationship with God and hindered his spiritual progress. David always responded by humbling himself, repenting and accepting God's correction.

It is the grace of God when He opens our eyes and shows us our true condition. And if we respond as David did, the hindrance that held us back will be gone, and we will be set free to make progress on our spiritual journey.

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