



Articles and Sermons :: The Green Letters: Principles of Spiritual Growth (The Aspect of Time) - Miles Stan

The Green Letters: Principles of Spiritual Growth (The Aspect of Time) - Miles Stanford - posted by PaulWest (), on: 201

It seems that most believers have difficulty in realizing and facing up to the inexorable fact that God does not hurry in His development of our Christian life. He is working from and for eternity! So many feel they are not making progress unless they are swiftly and constantly forging ahead. Now it is true that the new convert often begins and continues for some time at a fast rate. But this will not continue if there is to be healthy growth and ultimate maturity. God Himself will modify the pace. This is important to see, since in most instances when seeming declension begins to set in, it is not, as so many think, a matter of backsliding.

John Darby makes it plain that "it is God's way to set people aside after their first start, that self-confidence may die down. Thus Moses was forty years. On his first start he had to run away. Paul was three years also, after his first testimony. Not that God did not approve the first earnest testimony. We must get to know ourselves and that we have no strength. Thus we must learn, and then leaning on the Lord we can with more maturity, and more experientially, deal with souls."

Since the Christian life matures and becomes fruitful by the principle of growth (see II Pet. 3:18) rather than by struggle and "experiences," much time is involved. Unless we see and acquiesce to this, there is bound to be constant frustration, to say nothing of resistance to our Father's development processes for us. Dr. A. H. Strong illustrates for us: "A student asked the President of his school whether he could not take a shorter course than the one prescribed. 'Oh yes,' replied the President, 'but then it depends upon what you want to be. When God wants to make an oak, He takes a hundred years, but when He wants to make a squash, He takes six months.'" Strong also wisely points out to us that "growth is not a uniform thing in the tree or in the Christian. In some single months there is more growth than in all the year besides. During the rest of the year, however, there is solidification, without which the green timber would be useless. The period of rapid growth, when woody fibre is actually deposited between the bark and the trunk, occupies but four to six weeks in May, June and July."

Let's settle it once and for all—there are no shortcuts to reality! A meteor is on a shortcut as it proceeds to burn out, but not a star, with its steady light so often depended on by navigators. Unless the time factor is acknowledged from the heart, there is always danger of turning to the false enticement of a shortcut via the means of "experiences" and "blessings," where one becomes pathetically enmeshed in the vortex of ever-changing feelings, adrift from the moorings of scriptural facts.

In regard to this subject George Goodman writes: "Some have been betrayed into professing perfection or full deliverance, because at the time they speak they are happy and confident in the Lord. They forget that it is not a present experience that ensures fruit unto maturity, but a patient continuance in well doing. To taste of the grace of God is one thing; to be established in it and manifest it in character, habit, and regular life, is another. Experiences and blessings, though real gracious visitations from the Lord, are not sufficient to rest upon, nor should they lead us to glory in ourselves, as if we had a store of grace for time to come, or were yet at the end of the conflict. No. Fruit ripens slowly; days of sunshine and days of storm each add their share. Blessing will succeed blessing, and storm follow storm before the fruit is full grown or comes to maturity."

In that the Husbandman's method for true spiritual growth involves pain as well as joy, suffering as well as happiness, failure as well as success, inactivity as well as service, death as well as life, the temptation to shortcut is especially strong unless we see the value of, and submit to, the necessity of the time element. In simple trust we must rest in His hands, "being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). And it will take that long! But since God is working for eternity, why should we be concerned about the time involved?

Graham Scroggie affirmed, "Spiritual renewal is a gradual process. All growth is progressive, and the finer the organism, the longer the process. It is from measure to measure: thirtyfold, sixtyfold, an hundredfold. It is from stage to stage: 'first the blade, then the ear, and after that, the full corn in the ear.' And it is from day to day. How varied these are! There are great days, days of decisive battles, days of crises in spiritual history, days of triumph in Christian service, days of the right hand of God upon us. But there are also idle days, days apparently useless, when even prayer and holy service seem a burden. Are we, in any sense, renewed in these days? Yes, for any experience which makes us more

aware of our need of God must contribute to spiritual progress, unless we deny the Lord who bought us."

We might consider some familiar names of believers whom God obviously brought to maturity and used for His glory—such as Pierson, Chapman, Tauler, Moody, Goforth, Mueller, Taylor, Watt, Trumbull, Meyer, Murray, Havergal, Guyon, Mabie, Gordon, Hyde, Mantle, McCheyne, McConkey, Deck, Paxson, Stoney, Saphir, Carmichael and Hopkins. The average for these was 15 years after they entered their life work before they began to know the Lord Jesus as their Life and ceased trying to work for Him and began allowing Him to be their All in all and do His work through them. This is not to discourage us in any way but to help us to settle down with our sights on eternity, by faith "apprehend that for which he also... apprehended of Christ Jesus... Press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:12,14).

Certainly this is not to discount a Spirit-fostered experience, blessing, or even a crisis; but it is to be remembered that these simply contribute to the overall, and all-important, process. It takes time to get to know ourselves; it takes time and eternity to get to know our infinite Lord Jesus Christ. Today is the day to put our hand to the plow and to irrevocably set our heart on His goal for us—that we "may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death" (v. 10).

"So often in the battle," says Austin-Sparks, "we go to the Lord, and pray, and plead, and appeal for victory, for ascendancy, for mastery over the forces of evil and death, and our thought is that in some way the Lord is going to come in with a mighty exercise of power and put us into a place of victory and spiritual ascendancy as in an act. We must have this mentality corrected. What the Lord does is to enlarge us to possess. He puts us through some exercise, through some experience, takes us by some way which means our spiritual expansion, and exercise of spirituality so we occupy the larger place spontaneously. 'I will not drive them out from before thee in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee. By little and little I will drive them out before thee, until thou be increased' (Ex. 23:29,30).

"One day in the House of Commons, British Prime Minister Disraeli made a brilliant speech on the spur of the moment. That night a friend said to him, 'I must tell you how much I enjoyed your extemporaneous talk. It's been on my mind all day.' 'Madam,' confessed Disraeli, 'that extemporaneous talk has been on my mind for twenty years!'"

<http://www.angelfire.com/mo2/goodnews/growth.html#ch01>

Re: The Green Letters: Principles of Spiritual Growth (The Aspect of Time) - Miles St - posted by TrueWitness, on: 2013

I am a fan of Miles Stanford and his exegesis of scripture. He has 3 books that I am aware of:

The Complete Green Letters
Position to Person
None But the Hungry Heart

If you read only one of these, read The Complete Green Letters. It deals with Christian Growth.

His emphasis is on the identification truths of our being united with Christ (in Christ), our death with Christ, our resurrection with Christ, our ascension and being seated with Christ. Think of these as our inheritance in Christ. Did you know that you can own something yet not possess it? Israel owned the Promised Land by God's Promise to Abraham. They did not possess it until their feet trod upon it during the time of Joshua. They had battles to defeat enemies in the land and they overcame by faith and obedience to God (through Joshua). This is a deep metaphor for the Christian life and walk. The point I am trying to make is that all of our blessings in Christ are there for the taking but are not dumped into our lap automatically. God fills the hungry heart. Of course salvation, being born into the family of God through Jesus Christ is the easiest and lowest hanging fruit on the tree. It is ours in an instant following faith in Christ and his atoning work for us and repentance from a life lived independently of Him (rebellion, sin, indifference to God). The benefits of all the other blessing we have in Christ will not experienced by us in a practical demonstrated way unless we APPROPRIATE them by faith and demonstrate that faith by yielding to the Spirit. It is the Spirit who ministers the reality of our new life in Christ and it comes only by faith. Faith, by the way, is not just mental assent or acquiescence to a teaching. It comes first by revelation of the Spirit when you KNOW in your "knower" the truth of it. So here is another chapter from Miles Stanford's Green Letters:

Chapter 7—Appropriation

Here is an important subject that has to do with faith and the practical reception of that which we are able to trust Him for. Appropriation does not necessarily mean to gain something new but to set aside for our practical possession something that already belongs to us.

In order to appropriate something for our daily walk in Christ, there are two essentials: to see what is already ours in Christ; and to be aware of our need for it. On these two factors rests the ability to appropriate—to reach out in steadfast faith and receive that which belongs to us in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Regarding the first essential, to see that which is already ours, William R. Newell wrote: “Paul does not ask a thing of the saints in the first three chapters of Ephesians but just to listen while he proclaims that wondrous series of great and eternal FACTS concerning them; and not until he has completed this catalogue of realities about them does he ask them to do anything at all!

“And when he does open his plea for their high walk as saints, everything is based on the revelation before given the facts of their high character and destiny as saints: ‘I therefore beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called’ (Eph. 4:1). Let us cease laying down to the saints long lists of ‘conditions’ of entering into the blessed life in Christ; and instead, as the primal preparation for leading them into the experience of this life, show them what their position, possessions, and privileges in Christ already are. Thus shall we truly work with the Holy Spirit, and thus shall we have more, and much more abiding fruit of our labors among the people of God.”

Once we see that which is ours in Christ Jesus, practical need will cause us to appropriate, to receive, the answer to that need. “There was a ‘supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ’ for Paul, and that made it possible for Christ to be magnified in him. It was a supply which was always available, but only appreciated and appropriated as and when the Apostle came to know his need. Life is meant to bring a succession of discoveries of our need of Christ, and with every such discovery the way is opened for a new inflow of the supply. This is the explanation of so much that we cannot otherwise understand—this plunging of us into new tests where only a fresh supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ will meet our need. And as our need is met, as we prove the sufficiency of Christ to meet our inward need, so there can be a new showing forth of His glory through us.” (H. F.).

These two realities of seeing and needing bring us from childish meandering into a responsible, specific walk of faith. They take us from the “help me” attitude to that of giving thanks; from begging to appropriation. Notice what L. L. Letgers, co-founder of Wycliffe Bible Translators, has to say about this, referring to Ephesians 1:3: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ”: “If you run over in your mind and find one single blessing with which God might bless us today, with which He has not already blessed us, then what He told Paul was not true at all, because he said, ‘God hath.’ It is all done. ‘It is finished.’ God hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies! The great pity of it all is that we are saying, ‘O God bless us, bless us in this, bless us in that!’ and it is all done. He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies.” As C. A. Coates said, “It is appropriation that tests us. How often we stop at admiration.”

From time to time the Holy Spirit will bring to our attention a certain aspect of the Word in a striking manner, and we will rejoice to see and believe that it is ours in Christ. It may be, for instance, the truths of Matthew 11:28: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Besides the usual personal situations, the uncertainty, strife and tensions of world conditions provide just what is needed for the believer to abide, to rest, in the Lord Jesus. The need exists, and when he sees the rest in Him, all there remains to do is to appropriate!

So far so good. The believer sees what he possesses in Christ, and the need enables him to reach out and confidently appropriate and accept the required rest. This appropriation must be a case of clear, scriptural, specific trust. We are not to “ask amiss.” And now comes the critical phase, the key to it all. In most instances of appropriation there is a waiting period between the acceptance and the receiving—often of years. Our responsibility is to patiently wait on Him during the time necessary for Him to work into our character, our life, that which we have appropriated in Christ—in this instance, His rest, steadiness, assurance and security. Isaiah 64:4 refers to what God “hath prepared for him that waiteth for him.”

T. Austin-Sparks gives us two valuable thoughts regarding this all-important gap—usually a matter of years—between the actual appropriation and the practical experience. “Every bit of truth we receive, if we receive it livingly, will take u

s into conflict and will be established through conflict. It will be worthless until there has been a battle over it. Take any position the Lord calls you to take, and, if you are taking it with Him, you are going through things in it, and there will be an element added by reason of the battle. You have taken a position—yes but you have not really got it yet, the real value of it has not been proved. You have not come into the real significance of it until there has been some sore conflict in relation to it...

“As the result of the work of His cross, and as the grand issue of His resurrection, eternal life is received already by those who believe. But while that life is itself victorious, incorruptible, indestructible, the believer has to come by faith to prove it, to live by it, to learn its laws, to be conformed to it. There is a deposit in the believer, which in itself needs no addition, so far as its quality is concerned. So far as its victory, its power, its glory, its potentialities are concerned nothing can be added to it. But the course of spiritual experience, of spiritual life, is to discover, to appropriate, and to live by all that the life represents and means.”

Now we have seen a third element involved in our appropriation. After we have seen our possessions in Christ and become aware of our need, then we must give Him the necessary time to work the appropriation into our everyday walk. If we are looking for our needs to be met in the next interview, the next devotional book, the next series of special meetings, the next hoped for “revival,” then reality will never come.

In this matter of Christian development there is no shortcut, no quick and easy way. The Husbandman builds into the believer that which He intends to minister through him to others. In order to minister Life to others, what one does and says must flow from what he is. “For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell” (Col. 1:19); “For we are made partakers of Christ” (Heb. 3:14); “That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph. 3:19); “Your life is hid with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3); “That the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh” (II Cor. 4:11).

How often we simply admire and talk about truths the Holy Spirit reveals to us in the Word, whereas His primary purpose in giving them to us is that we might stand on them in faith, waiting confidently for Him to make them an integral part of our life. “A prophet is one who has a history, one who has been dealt with by God, one who has experienced the formative work of the Spirit. We are sometimes asked by would-be preachers how many days should be spent in preparation of a sermon. The answer is: At least ten years, and probably nearer twenty! For the preacher matters to God at least as much as the thing preached. God chooses as His prophets those in whom He has already worked what He intends to use as His message for today” (Watchman Nee).

Re: - posted by AbideinHim (), on: 2013/7/27 13:54

These are excellent teachings on spiritual growth, and I taught them at one of the prisons in La. over a period of several months.

Mike

Re: - posted by TrueWitness, on: 2013/7/27 15:30

The Complete Green Letters is actually 5 books about Christian growth in one. Perhaps the title "green" references "growth". I don't know for sure. Anyway, the five books in sequential and logical order are:

The Green Letters: Principles of Spiritual Growth

The Principle of Position: Foundations of Spiritual Growth

The Ground of Growth: The Christian's Relationship to the Cross and the Risen Christ

The Reckoning That Counts: The Realization of Spiritual Growth

Abide Above: A Guide to Spiritual Growth

The first 2 books can be read online at:

<http://milesstanford.com/>

None But The Hungry Heart is a devotional of 12 X 31 short daily teachings or reflections. Quite good. Lots of quotes from old-time Plymouth Brethren such as J. B. Stoney and C. A. Coates. Link to download the pdf file:

<http://www.fbcva.org/files/Ministries/Global%20Missions/Text%20lessons/English/Topical%20studies/NONE%20BUT%20THE%20HUNGRY%20HEART.pdf>