



[1 Timothy 2:3-4](#)

(3) For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; (4) Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

[Ephesians 4:13](#)

(13) Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:
King James Version

If it is [God's will](#) that we be saved and grow in the [grace](#) and the knowledge of [Jesus Christ](#), why is it so hard? If [God](#) is working with us, should this not be easy? Our first response to this is very likely, "Well, I guess it's just that I am so evil"; "It must be human nature"; or "I'm so bad God must not be hearing my prayers." Some get so weary with the difficulty that they say, "God will just have to take me as I am."

All these justifications may indeed be factors, but they are not precisely correct because most of us have some besetting [sin](#) or sins that we fail miserably to overcome time after time. Why, if it is God's will, do we not overcome them more easily?

The sin need not be easily recognizable by others, as Paul writes to Timothy that "some men's sins are clearly evident" ([1 Timothy 5:24](#)). It can be a hidden sin, though we are well aware of it, know it is evil, and feel constant guilt and self-condemnation because of our weakness before it.

It can be a sin of omission and not a sin of commission, in which one is directly guilty of bringing loss or pain upon another. Perhaps the failing concerns acts of [kindness](#) or [mercy](#) that we have frequently and consistently failed to do to relieve another's burden, but we know of it and are convicted of its seriousness.

This is the key to understanding why spiritual growth is so hard. Consider one's original

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[conversion](#). Why did this even occur? [Romans 2:4](#) says, "Or do you despise the riches of His [goodness](#), forbearance, and [longsuffering](#), not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to [repentance](#)." This happened only because God was revealing Himself and making us conscious of factors of life we had never before felt with that force. It moved us to repent and throw ourselves on His mercy. In reality, it was the only option He held open to us because we felt powerless to go in any other direction. Can we overcome death? The key is our awareness of powerlessness as the first essential element to spiritual growth.

In [II Corinthians 12:10](#), Paul makes this point. "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong." In chapter 13:4, he adds emphasis to this by saying, "For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you." Just as a prerequisite to conversion is recognizing and acknowledging our utter failure in the face of sin and death, so also is a deep consciousness of our frailty required in the face of overcoming and growth in following God's way and glorifying Him.

Without this overriding sense of dependence, we will never turn to God in the first place. Without this sense of need, we will not continuously turn to Him because our passivity in this will declare that in reality, like the [Laodiceans](#), we think we need nothing and are sufficient unto ourselves. We will be like the confident Peter, who, boasting that unlike others he would never desert Christ, immediately fell flat on his face in spiritual failure. The secret of growth in Christian character largely lies in realizing our powerlessness and acknowledging it before God.

Perhaps [John 15:5](#) will now have more meaning. Jesus says, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." It does not mean that without Him we could never design an automobile or send a rocket to the moon. It means that we could produce nothing of a true, godly, spiritual nature within the calling of God that truly glorifies Him.

Just in case we think He is saying more than He really means, think about the following commands. Jesus says in [Matthew 5:44](#), "But I say to you, [love](#) your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you." He adds in [Matthew 6:31](#), "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'" If these are challenging, try [I Corinthians 15:34](#): "Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame."

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We have a long way to go. It is time to stop playing church—realizing that judgment is now on us—and turn to God with all our heart. He promises that, if we do this, He will hear from heaven and respond. We must constantly keep in mind that God is the Potter with the power to mold and shape as He wills. As the clay, our job is to yield, realizing even the power to submit comes from Him.

To understand this from an even broader perspective, we must consider how mankind has acted in its [relationship with God](#) beginning with [Adam and Eve](#). They said, "God, stay out of our lives. We don't need you. We will do this ourselves." Therefore, rather than choosing from the Tree of Life, they chose from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. All mankind has copied this approach down to the Laodiceans, who say they are rich and increased with goods and need nothing. It will continue even to those who will curse and blaspheme God during the final plagues in the [Day of the Lord \(Revelation 16:21\)](#).

— John W. Ritenbaugh

To learn more, see:

[The Sovereignty of God and Human Responsibility: Part Eleven](#)

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