

Spiritual Growth Lessons from Christian Ambassadors

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Strive to Enter at the Strait Gate

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King Solomon tells us in Proverbs 16:25, that there is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death. He was speaking about the pride of life, of those who walk according to the course of this world. It is inevitable, anyone determined to have their own way, defying the spiritual laws of God, is headed for a fall.

Proverbs 16:18 (NIV) - Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.

With the fall come feelings of disbelief, hurt, confusion, anger or even wrath. Tormented with a series of negative thoughts, they no longer are sure about anyone or anything. From this helpless position of uncertainty, they don't know where to turn or what to do next. All they really know is that they are sick and tired of winding up in the same place; locked in a prison of their own making.

In this hopeless state, cowering in the darkness of sin and despair, along comes a Christian, offering a brand new life through Christ. That life can sound mighty appealing to someone on the bottom rung of life's ladder. Desperate for the misery to stop, a person in this position is willing to try just about anything to ease their pain. They grasp at Christianity; mistakenly *thinking it* is the fastest and easiest cure.

So, the scenario begins: Standing in the dark world outside the Kingdom of God, looking in at the blessings promised, the sinner is attracted to that new life in Christ. Who wouldn't want to be saved and given another chance to live a life of victory in the here and now? In short, who wouldn't want to trade in the "old man" for the "new man"? Sounds like a pretty good deal, this Christian life.

The scenario continues: Just accept Jesus as Savior, repent of your sins and bask in God's unconditional love. Floating on a spiritual high, the new Christian imagines the promise of being transported quickly into God's Kingdom. Just pledge your life to Jesus, and then be whisked away into the Father's angelic computer lab, where the "old man" computer chip is

removed and the "new man" computer chip is popped in place. With our "new nature" we are immediately qualified to live happily ever after in the Kingdom of God.

End of scenario -- back to reality: The "new life" God has waiting for us doesn't come about simply by switching out the old computer chip for a brand new one. Entry into the Kingdom of God can never be automatic, but is the result and the reward of a struggle. In the New Testament we find Paul encouraging his disciples to remain true to the faith, because of the struggle or strenuous effort they would be going through. Their very endurance, patience, and faith would be tested.

Acts 14:22 (KJV) - "...We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."

The struggle to enter into the Kingdom of God is so intense, it has been described as an agony of the soul and the spirit. Jesus tells us in Luke that we must strive or labor fervently to enter in at the strait gate; that narrow gate, which leads to life. If we do not put forth every effort to enter in the way Jesus tells us to enter, there is the danger we might be shut out of the Kingdom.

Luke 13:23-25 (KJV) - "Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are..."

The person who asked Jesus the question, "Are there few that be saved?" must have seen that his committed followers were rapidly dropping off. Those who once followed Jesus with such eagerness were already giving up the effort. They stopped striving to enter into the Kingdom. As at

other times, when the teachings of Jesus became too hard, the people turned away.

John 6:66 (NIV) - *From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.*

We need to be honest with ourselves. If we are having trouble staying on the narrow path and living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ now, how do we expect to live under the authority and rule of Jesus in his Kingdom? If we are too impatient to stay on the narrow path now, allowing Jesus time to cleanse us of all of our unrighteousness, then we are losing out to one of the basic conflicts of the Kingdom; the conflict or struggle of making "proper choice" and being firm in that which God has spoken.

1 John 1:6-7 (KJV) - *If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*

The "proper choice" for the Christian is always the same, the narrow path of cleansing. We either progress forward into the light, to be continually cleansed by the blood of Jesus, or we will find ourselves going backwards into the darkness.

To walk successfully in the Kingdom of God, we must accept the principles of God in our heart and mind. We must settle it in our heart that this strait and narrow path is not something we are *trying* to follow – we *are* following it! Only those who are willing to carefully count the cost will be able to enter into the strait gate. The cost of entering is our very life. It's time to move and press forward as never before, if we are to lay hold of the Kingdom of God. I won't lie to you. Just the thought of moving and pressing forward to lay hold of a "new life" in Christ creates tension.

As one inmate confessed, "I think we all know what is demanded of us from God. But, a lot of us are still stuck in the *middle*. What I'm saying is that I have found myself like that. I know that I may be able to fool this guy or that guy, but I know I can't fool God, and I know I can't fool you either, Miss Sharon. I'm feeling guilty because of how disobe-

dient I've been to my Lord, and if I was really grateful, I'd be a stronger soldier for Christ."

Like it or not, there is conflict in entering God's Kingdom. This conflict or struggle is not with the world and it's not with what is going on outside of us. As this inmate so honestly confessed, the conflict is internal. It has to do with what is going on inside of us, in our mind and in our heart. It is the pressure of making the "proper choice". As I described earlier, "It is an agony of the soul and spirit." Are we willing to let go of something we hold valuable, even our very lives, to lay hold of the Kingdom of God?

In the midst of all this pressure, we may find ourselves crying out, "Oh God, why do we have to make a choice?" We have to make a choice because God is looking for sons and daughters. From the last Adam, God is bringing forth a seed, sons and daughters who can make the proper choice to walk with Jesus Christ, the new Adam. Where the old Adam failed, this new one has succeeded. Glory to God in the highest! God is bringing forth spiritually mature sons and daughters who will shine as lights in this dark world.

Isaiah 60:2 (KJV) - *For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee.*



Questions for Personal or Group Study:

1. If you are having trouble surrendering your life to Jesus, is it because you are still waiting for God to magically transform you into a "new person"?
2. If transformation doesn't happen magically what is your responsibility to become a "new person"?
3. What is the role of faith in God, repentance from sin, trust in His Word, and surrender to His will? (See: Romans 12:1-2; John 4:23-24)