

Give Up to Grow Up

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The apostle Paul instructed the saints of Ephesus to mature. They needed to grow up into the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13-14). Children are weak and easily persuaded, whereas adults are strong and steady. Of course, we know we must improve and develop our character as Christians. The struggle we have is about how to do this.

American philosopher, Henry David Thoreau, once said, "The price of anything is the amount of life you exchange for it." This is a hard truth. If we want to gain something, we must give something up. There is a cost for everything we acquire in life. This is a Biblical principle. For example, to grow the fruit of the Spirit, we must give up the works of the flesh. In other words, we must give up to grow up!

Sacrifice is always difficult. Much of what we are called to sacrifice brings momentary pleasure. Sin deceives us into thinking we need it to have an enjoyable life. In reality, short-term happiness must be sacrificed to gain long-term contentment. Consider the following things we must give up to grow up.

We Must Give Up...

1). Excuses. Excuses are a tell-tale sign of immaturity. Some people always have a list of reasons why they cannot make progress of any kind in their life. We live in a society that encourages excuse-making. Our society empowers victimhood. Everyone has obstacles and hindrances in their lives. We all experience setbacks. Regrettably, some use them as the reasons why they cannot better themselves. Even worse, some use these excuses to demand others take care of them.

Now, there are real victims in society. Some people genuinely need help. We can read about Christians in the Bible who were persecuted and marginalized. Jesus taught we are to serve the least among us. This point is not directed at people who need help. This is directed at people who refuse to take responsibility for their life and faith.

In the days of Ezekiel, society blamed their parents and grandparents for their problems. There was some truth to their complaint. We are all affected by our parents and grandparents. However, Ezekiel declared the days of blaming the older generation were over! God held the people personally accountable for their lives.

"What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge'? As I live, declares the Lord GOD, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die" (Ezek. 18:2-4).

Some people come from terrible backgrounds. They were raised by unloving parents. They grew up on the wrong side of town. They did not get the job they wanted. They got overlooked for promotion. All of this and more may be true. All of us have had bad things done to us, said about us, and happen to us. In those moments, we are a victim. If we choose to live in this moment for the rest of our lives, we will never grow up.

We cannot change what has happened to us in the past. But we can control how we respond to the present. C.S. Lewis once said, "You can't go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending." If we want to grow up, we must give up our excuses.

2). Bad habits. Bad habits typically are sinful. They get in the way of the training and discipline required to grow. Bad habits hinder the heart. Bad habits waste time. Bad habits are selfish. Bad habits rob our abilities and potential.

All of us have struggled with bad habits. Breaking bad habits can seem impossible. Someone once said, "The only way to break a bad habit is to replace it with a good habit." This is true. This is Biblical!

As referenced earlier, we must replace the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit. When we remove sin from our lives, we replace it with righteousness. God does not just seek to empty us. He wants to fulfill us! If we want to grow up, we must give up our bad habits.

3). Unhealthy relationships. We become who we hang around. We cannot help but be influenced by the people around us. If we choose to associate with ungodly people, we are going to become ungodly. This is common knowledge. The apostle Paul quoted from the Greek dramatist, Menander, when he wrote, "Bad company ruins good morals." (1 Cor. 15:33). This is an undeniable fact of life.

Are there people in our lives who are hindering our spiritual growth? Are there people in our lives who are encouraging our victimhood mentality? Are there people in our lives who share our bad habits? These represent unhealthy relationships. They have the potential to do more than just hinder us. They can destroy us.

Jesus frequently spoke of sacrifice. He acknowledged the sad reality that His followers may lose relationships for the sake of the kingdom. He said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life" Luke 18:29-30). Surprisingly, there is much to be gained by sacrifice. If we want to grow up, we must give up unhealthy relationships.

Conclusion

Growing up is challenging. Leaving childhood and entering adulthood can be a difficult transition. Paul wrote, “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways” (1 Corinthians 13:11). The spiritual application is obvious. If we want to grow up, we must give up!