

Paul writes to us, as he did to Timothy: “Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (II Tim. 2:1-3). We rejoice with you as you continue in Him. “The Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you” (II Thess. 3:3).



**Principles of Spiritual
Growth Series - Lesson 18:
CONTINUATION**

By Miles J. Stanford

This article is taken from the wonderful little book, Principles of Spiritual Growth, authored by Miles J. Stanford.

When we first start out, hungry and zealous for Him, it is often imagined that extensive progress has been made when as yet we have barely begun. As our Lord takes us along through the years, it slowly dawns on us that there are vast, almost infinite, areas of development through which He must still lead us.

Many of these development areas are just plain desert—no spiritual activity, no service, little or no fellowship with Him or with others. What prayer there is has to be forced and is sometimes dropped altogether for months at a time. Bible study finally grinds to a halt; everything seems to add up to nothing. It is during these necessary times that the believer often feels that God has ceased to carry out His part and that there is little or no use in seeking to continue on. And yet there is a hunger deep within that will not allow him to quit. “The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal The Lord knoweth them that are his” (II Tim. 2:19).

Are we to love and trust and respond to Him only when He seems to be “blessing” us? What sort of love is that? Self-love? Our Father strips everything away from time to time in order to give us the opportunity of loving and trusting and responding to Him just because He is our Father. He knows what the cross is going to mean in our lives. He knows the death-march that lies ahead of us in order that there may be resurrection life. He knows the barren, bleeding hearts beyond to whom He must minister through us—hence He is going to bring us to the place where we don’t care what happens, He is all that matters!

“Sonship is something more than being born again. It represents growth into fulness. It is quite a good thing to be a babe while babyhood lasts, but it is a bad thing to be a babe when

that period is past. This is the condition of many Christians. While sonship is inherent in birth, in the New Testament sense sonship is the realization of the possibilities of birth. It is growth to maturity. So the New Testament has a lot to say about growing up, leaving childhood and attaining unto full stature. With this growth comes the greater fulness of Christ and the abundant wealth unto which we are saved. It is a matter not so much of that from which we are saved as of that unto which we are saved” (T. Austin-Sparks).

In the beginning we are mainly taken up with the externals of our Christian life, and the Lord allows this for a time. Then, in order to get us and our externals out of the way so that the Lord Jesus Christ can be our all, our Father begins to take away much of what we thought we had. Here begins the long cross-centered transition from “do” to “be.”

All this paradoxical progress—the way up being down—has a strong tendency to make us feel that the Lord is not taking us on. This is simply a weapon of the enemy, easily parried by letting God be God in the scriptural knowledge that He is our Father.

“It is true that God does take up those who are not worthy and permits them to speak His words years before they fully understand their import; but He does not wish any of us to stop there. We may go on in that way for awhile, but is it not true that, from the time when He begins in us His work of formation through discipline and chastening, it growingly dawns on us how little in fact we knew of the true meaning of what we had been saying and doing? He intends that we should reach the place where we can speak, with or without manifest gifts, because we are the thing we say. For in Christian experience the spiritual things of God

are less and less outward, that is, of gift, and more and more inward, of life. In the long run it is the depth and inwardness of a work that counts. As the Lord himself becomes more and more to us, other things—yes, and this must include even His gifts—matter less and less. Then, though we teach the same doctrine, speak the same words, the impact on others is very different, manifesting itself in an increasing depth of the Spirit’s work within them also” (Watchman Nee).

His relentless processing will discourage and baffle us if we simply want heaven when we die. But if we want what He wants, all that we are taken through, including the desert, will encourage us. Thus we will continue because we know that He ever continues to work in and through us that which He began and finished on our behalf in our Lord Jesus Christ.

“If our hearts are really true to Him we may be assured He will lead us on in the knowledge of Himself just as fast as we are able to advance. He knows how much we can take in, and He does not fail to minister to us the very food that is suitable to our present need. We may sometimes feel inclined to be impatient with ourselves because we do not make more rapid progress, but we have to learn to trust the Lord with our spiritual education. If our eyes are upon Him, and we follow with simple hearts as He leads us, we shall find that He leads us by a right way and brings us through all the exercises we need in order to form our souls in the appreciation of Himself, and of all those blessed things which are brought to pass in Him. We have to trust His love all through, and to learn increasingly to distrust ourselves” (C. A. Coates).