

Question: I really would like to be a good Christian, but I seem to keep messing up. I don't seem to be growing in my Christian faith and life. What would Jesus do?

The development of a Christ-like character is not a one-time event. It is a process that takes place over time. But often we expect too much too fast. Consider the legend of the Indian princess who went looking for the perfect ear of corn. Going to a neighboring chief whose cornfield was the talk of all the tribes, she asked permission to select one ear for seed. The chief granted her permission to walk down the longest row of corn and take the finest ear she could find on one condition: she must choose as she passed. The princess, of course, kept on looking for the perfect ear until she walked completely out of the cornfield empty-handed.

Just as there are no perfect ears of corn, there are no perfect Christians in this world. Although God's plan for his people is perfect, the only one who has ever lived up to that perfect plan was Jesus Christ; and he was crucified. However, those who live by faith do share a hope of becoming like him someday. The apostle John wrote: "Dear friends, now are we children of God, and what will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). Until then, if we are faithful to Christ we are still growing toward that perfection (Hebrews 6:1).

Because the Christian life is a growth process, we must have patience and allow ourselves time to grow. Neither mature stalks of corn nor spiritual maturity are developed overnight. We know not to expect the same quality of grain from the corn stalk at different stages of the growth process. In the same way, we must be patient not only with ourselves but also with others who are at different stages in our spiritual growth. Just as we would nurture and tend young and immature plants, Christians should encourage each other through this spiritual growth process. Our attitude needs to be that of Paul when he said, "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on . . . toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:12-14 NIV).

The word of our Lord acknowledges the difficulties of spiritual growth and continuous struggle to overcome sin in one's life. The apostle John said, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the

truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8 NIV). But if we don’t give up on Jesus, he won’t give up on us. We can take heart from what Paul told the Galatians, “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up” (Galatians 6:9 NIV).

There may be times when we will be disappointed in ourselves or in our fellow Christians. I believe that Jesus will understand. As long as progress is being made toward becoming like Christ, we must not give up on ourselves or on others. The Lord has not yet finished his work on us.

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