

S T U D Y G U I D E



Developing Christian Character

by R.C. Sproul



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The Struggle for Spiritual Growth

MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

The Christian life is not easy. It engages us in a spiritual battle of cosmic proportions. In this study, Dr. Sproul examines our three chief foes in this battle: the world, the flesh, and the devil. This will help us understand why Christian growth is not easy, but is a complex, lifelong process.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To be able to explain why Christian growth is not simplistic but complex
2. To be able to explain why Christian growth is a lifelong process.
3. To understand that the principal obstacles to Christian growth are the fallen world, fallen man, and the power of Satan

QUOTATIONS

The devil is a great student in divinity.

— William Gurnall

All the danger is when the world gets into the heart. The water is useful for the sailing of the ship; all the danger is when the water gets into the ship; so the fear is when the world gets into the heart.

— Thomas Watson

LECTURE OUTLINE

- A. Christian growth is not easy.
 - 1. Becoming a Christian brings a new dimension of complication to a person's life.
 - 2. Some believe that growth comes easily, by "sitting back and letting nature take its course."
 - 3. The basic call of the New Testament—to grow in Christ—accents disciplined struggle.
 - 4. According to Martin Luther, there are three chief obstacles to Christian growth.
 - a. The world.
 - b. The flesh.
 - c. The devil.
 - 5. The great Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper referred to these three obstacles using different terminology.
 - a. Fallen nature.
 - b. Fallen mankind.
 - c. Fallen spirits.
- B. How do these obstacles inhibit Christian growth?
 - 1. Fallen nature (the world).
 - 2. Fallen mankind (the flesh).
 - a. The things that contribute to war and world conflict take place daily at the level of our interpersonal relationships.
 - b. The biggest enemy of my own spiritual growth is me.
 - 3. Fallen spirits (the devil).
- C. What do we have to withstand these enemies?
 - 1. Christ.
 - 2. The Holy Spirit.
 - 3. The Church.
 - 4. The means of grace.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- 1. The basic call of the New Testament—to grow in Christ—accents _____ struggle.
 - a. Little
 - b. Disciplined
 - c. No
 - d. Only spiritual
- 2. Who said that the three chief obstacles to Christian growth are the world, the flesh, and the devil?
 - a. John Calvin
 - b. Augustine
 - c. Martin Luther
 - d. John Knox

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3. The world, or fallen nature, resists us because _____.
 - a. We brought God's curse on it through our sin.
 - b. Satan is the one controlling it.
 - c. God wills it for our sanctification.
 - d. Both a and c

 4. One of the marks of Christian growth is an increasing awareness of our _____ condition.
 - a. Sinful
 - b. Righteous
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Perfect

 5. One evidence of our struggle against the flesh is the _____ we experience in our interpersonal relationships.
 - a. Harmony
 - b. Love
 - c. Conflict
 - d. Ambivalence

 6. We experience a struggle within ourselves because _____.
 - a. Our sinful nature still controls us.
 - b. Our old nature has not been completely vanquished.
 - c. We don't know the difference between right and wrong.
 - d. We are not truly Christian.

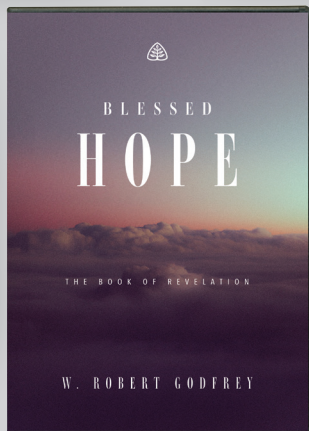
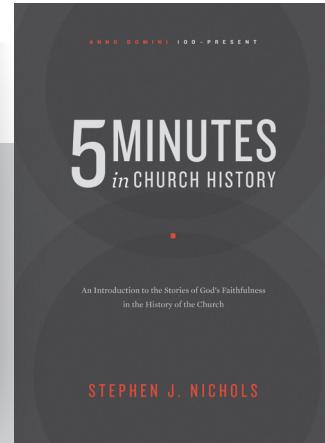
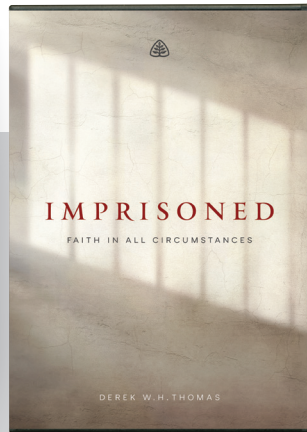
 7. The phrase "deliver us from evil" in the Lord's Prayer means "deliver us from _____."
 - a. Pain
 - b. The world
 - c. Ourselves
 - d. The evil one

 8. The biggest enemy of our own spiritual growth is what?
 - a. Ourselves
 - b. Worldly entertainment
 - c. Legalism
 - d. Antinomianism

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Dr. Sproul said that God wills our struggle with the fallen world for our own good. How is this struggle good for us?
2. How does Satan hinder spiritual growth? Do Christians tend to blame some things on Satan that are really the result of our own sinful nature?
3. Many believers begin their Christian life assuming that growth will be easy. Did you assume the same thing? What expectations did you have as a new believer? How has the experience of the Christian life challenged those assumptions?

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