

Theme: Christians should pray for strength from God to be able to fulfill our call to be in the world but not of it.

I. Intro – Specific Exercise Plan

- A. Originally I had just been randomly running - no plan
- B. Kids showed me I needed a specific plan
- C. Transformed my running, health, etc.
- D. Same thing with finances, business, etc.
- E. A plan for spiritual growth? What does it look like?

II. Devoted

- A. Ezra was devoted - he had set his heart
For Ezra had **devoted** himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel. Ezra 7:10
 - 1. Ezra did not have a laissez-faire approach to spiritual growth
 - 2. The early church was characterized by this same type of devotion to growing spiritually
They **devoted** themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer... ⁴⁶ Every day they **continued** to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, Acts 2:42, 46
 - 3. Every endeavor to grow in any area requires devotion - setting our heart and mind to do something
 - 4. If we are going to grow in our walks with Christ it will require devotion - setting our heart and mind with a

definite goal

B. Do I have a plan for spiritual growth?

- 1. If I don't have a plan, I will not grow
- 2. But to work, a growth plan will require devotion - setting my heart by God's grace

III. Devoted - A Plan For Spiritual Growth

- A. Step 1 - Devoted - studying the Word of God
For Ezra had **devoted himself to the study** and observance **of the Law of the Lord**, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel. Ezra 7:10
 - 1. The first step Ezra took was to study Torah
 - 2. Torah - not "law" as we think of it - but "instruction"
 - 3. If we want to grow spiritually we have to begin with God's Instruction - His Word
 - 4. The Scripture is essential to spiritual growth for the following reasons:
 - a. It points us to Christ & the Gospel - our source of life
From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 2 Timothy 3:15
 - b. It is our primary spiritual food
Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Matthew 4:4
 - c. It is the primary form of guidance from God
Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Joshua 1:8

d. It is our protection from Satan
Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand... ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Ephesians 6:13, 17

e. It gives strength in our struggle against sin
How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. ¹⁰ I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. ¹¹ I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Psalms 119:9–11

5. Spiritual growth is impossible apart from God's Word!

B. Step 2 - applying the Word of God to our own life

For Ezra had **devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord**, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel. Ezra 7:10

1. We must begin with personal study first - or else we are simply following others ideas rather than God's Word

2. But study and understanding must lead to application

3. Without application study leads to being deceived, thinking we are what we know

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. James 1:22

4. Remember Jesus' warning in Matthew 7:24-27 - the only difference is putting the Word into practice!

C. Step 3 - passing the Word on to others

For Ezra had **devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel**. Ezra 7:10

1. We can not teach and disciple others until we have studied ourselves and applied the Word in our own life
2. But we must then become disciple makers - passing the Word on to others
3. We are all called to multi-generational discipleship

a. Parents must teach and disciple their children
These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. ⁷ **Impress them on your children**. Talk about them when **you sit at home** and when you **walk along the road**, when you **lie down** and when you **get up**. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the **doorframes of your houses and on your gates**. Deuteronomy 6:6–9

1. Most of these can only be done in family context - walking, lying down, doorframes, gates, etc.
2. Parents bear PRIMARY responsibility for discipling children, teaching them the Word

b. Everyone discipled the next spiritual generation
You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. ² And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. 2 Timothy 2:1–2

IV. Applying the Word

A. Do I have a plan for spiritual growth?

1. A flourishing life is one that includes spiritual growth
2. To fail to plan is to plan to fail - in any area
3. Am I intentional about growing spiritually, or laissez-faire?

B. How well am I doing at spiritual growth?

1. Am I growing in my study of the Word of God?
 - a. Do I spend regular time in the Word on my own?
 - b. Am I growing in my knowledge of God through His Word?
2. Am I growing in my personal application of God's Word?
 - a. Do I study God's Word to apply it - or just fill my head with theoretical knowledge?
 - b. Do I seriously ask myself the questions from Applying the Word each week?
 - c. Can I say where I am being challenged to obey God's Word more closely?
3. Am I passing the Word on to others?
 - a. Parents - do you have regular family devotions?
 - b. Everyone - who am I helping grow in their relationship to God and His Word?
 - c. This passing on the Word includes formal and informal methods and times

C. Communion - receiving grace and strength to grow

1. This is not a plea for a Fall Resolution!
2. We receive strength from God through the means of grace - not law or will power
3. Today we will receive strength from God at the Table
4. Ask which of the three areas I need strength for the most

5. When you get the elements, talk with Jesus about that, asking Him to give you strength to grow

Devoted

Ezra 7:10
September 1, 2013
Communion
Hebrews 13:20-21

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, ²¹ equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Hebrews 13:20-21

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