

A
MESSAGE OF HOPE,
comfort and freedom in Jesus Christ

“The Holy Spirit’s Power and Our Efforts”

I was working in the garden last weekend, tilling and amending the soil in the hopes of increasing its fertility for next season’s crops, and got to thinking how much I love the parallels between gardening (how way God works in nature) and our individual spiritual growth. The same way the soil needs to be worked to bring forth life, our souls (mind, will, and emotions) also need to be worked. It is through this effort that we are transformed. Anyway, while tilling, I was listening to a podcast published through Crazy Love Ministries, a non-profit ministry started by Francis Chan (a pastor in California), with some sermons he shared over a decade ago. The truths he shared still have a great deal of application today and the Holy Spirit urged me to share some of the content with you.

The sermon Francis Chan shared was entitled, “The Holy Spirit’s Power and Our Efforts.” He began with recounting the following questions that were asked of him: What are your goals in life? What are your goals in ministry?

In response to the questions, he explained that at one time, years ago, his answer was that he didn’t know what his goals were in ministry. He didn’t know what his goals were in life, as far as what he was going to accomplish, or even what he wanted to accomplish. But he had a very clear vision of the man he wanted to become one day. He shared that his goals were wrapped around who he was going to become, not about what he was going to achieve. Francis then shared how years later, he realized he had gone astray by shifting his focus instead to what he wanted to accomplish, achieve, and do. God convicted him that this change in perspective was a mistake and would lead to ineffectiveness. Francis’ exhortation and encouragement to his congregation, himself, and us is to press on towards the goal of becoming the people God created us to be. The following is a paraphrase of his message as well as a practical application of 2 Peter 1:1-10. (I would encourage you to take a moment and read through that text before reading further.)

When you set a goal and put effort into becoming the person God created you to be, results in life will come about. This is an important part of our spiritual growth, and we must *make every effort* in becoming the people God created us to be. This is what He desires for us, and the simple truth is – God is more concerned about changing you than changing your circumstances. It could even be that He wants to keep you in a difficult circumstance because He is in the process of changing you. It’s about you growing your character. God loves you so much He doesn’t want you to stay where you are at. He wants to see you become the person He created you to be. God wants you to thrive in life!

My question for you then is: Do you want to change? Do you want the Holy Spirit to do His work in your life and with your character? God says He has given us His Holy Spirit; He given us everything we need for life and godliness. In answer to this blessing, we should desire to make every effort to add to our faith the virtues He wants us to have. Our mindset should be that we *get* to do these things (rather than feeling as if we are being *forced* to). It is a gift from God. He offers us a better life and a better way of living! As Christians, and as individuals filled with the Holy Spirit, we should have a desire to change. Again, we should view becoming more holy as an invitation and blessing, not as something forced upon us.

We have the potential to be amazingly godly individuals. We have the potential to be virtuous, self-controlled, persevering, knowledgeable individuals filled with tremendous love. God knows this about us. God knows this about you! That is why He tells us, through the Apostle Peter, to go after becoming that person and to make every effort in doing so. And the best part – God, through the Holy Spirit – gives us not only the desire to become these individuals, but the power to do so!

Do you believe that? I hope you do. Because that is where it starts. It starts with faith. That is why Peter begins his exhortation with faith (belief). “For this very reason make every effort to add to your faith goodness.” (2 Peter 1:5) He continues, “and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.” (2 Peter 1:5-7)

Are you doing this? Are you making every effort to add to your faith? To add to your goodness? To add to your knowledge? To add to your self-control? To add to your perseverance? To add to your godliness? To add to your mutual affection? To add to your love?

I am confident that many of you reading this right now are, in fact, doing these things. These are, most certainly, qualities that you possess, and I praise God for that! I would encourage you to continue to add to these things in ever-increasing measure. We are (hopefully) always growing, always making strides, always making an effort to become better, to become more and more the type of individuals God created us to be.

In his message, Francis asks us to go back for a moment to the perseverance Peter calls us to have, and to add to. In place of perseverance, some translations use the word steadfastness (others use the word patience). He explains that steadfastness is a word used for when you have a weight on you, but you keep holding it up. To say it another way, it is when you are holding up under a weight. When we are under pressure, weighed down, we typically pray for God to intervene, to take it away. Oftentimes, we want God to get rid of the weight so we can relax, so everything will be easy. Unfortunately, while an answer to this prayer could result in us being more comfortable, it doesn't help us in adding to our character. You don't become steadfast, you don't develop perseverance, unless there is some weight on you.

Francis uses the following illustration to get us thinking about it in, perhaps, a new way. If Jesus was to give you an option between two plans for next year, which would you choose? Plan A might look something like this: Jesus tells you He can make next year a very easy year for you. He will ensure everything is going to go your way. You want a better job, more money in your account, reconciliation with your loved ones, health for you and those you care about – He tells you, all that will come true for you. But, at the end of the year, you won't be any stronger than you are now. You won't be any closer to Him and you will not have grown in character or developed a stronger relationship with God. Plan B is quite different. It consists of you going through some hardships. Jesus tells you it won't be an easy year, but during the difficult times, you and He will get really close, so close that you will experience God in a way you never have before. He tells you, by the end of the year, you will be far beyond who and what you are today. You will have strength and perseverance like you have never had before, but it will be tough.

Would you choose Plan A or Plan B?

Over these next several weeks, as 2022 comes to a close and we step into a new year, I would encourage you to meditate on that question. Also, I want to challenge you to consider what your goals are (or will be). Are you wanting to develop a stronger character? One that is steadfast and holy? To walk closer to God than ever before? Or are your goals all about achievements?

When we shift our goals to that of making every effort to add to our faith, we won't get so frustrated with hardship. We can more easily obey James 1:2 when it says, "to consider it pure joy whenever you face trials." We will begin to see these trials as opportunities to persevere, knowing that it is in trials and hardships that God develops our character and refines us even more into the type of individuals He created us to be.

As 2 Peter 1:3 tells us, God "has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness." May we surrender even more, each and every day, to the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives and continue to make every effort to add to our faith. In doing so, we will not only find ourselves walking closer to God, but we will experience what Peter stated in verse 8 when he writes, "For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Blessing

"The LORD bless you and keep you, the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace. May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

(Numbers 6:24-26; Romans 15:13 NIV)