



Too Soon to Quit by Warren W. Wiersbe Chapter 12 – Paul, the Perfecter

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I. Paul, the Perfecter: Keep growing and you can keep going

A. People, events and situations can be either irritating or irritating, opportunities or obstacles, depending on how I handle them.

II. Never Stop Growing

A. After all that suffering Paul could still write, with an inspired pen and clean conscience, “I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances” (Phil. 4: 11)

B. The Greek word translated “content” could be translated “contained” or “sufficient within myself.”

C. Paul was humbly depending on the sufficiency of Christ who by His Spirit dwells within each believer. “I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength” (Phil. 4: 13)

D. Paul could keep going because he never stopped growing.

E. He was always expending energy as he ran the race toward the one goal of Christian perfection—the kind of spiritual maturity that would enable him to finish the race successfully. He wanted to be a blessing to as many people as possible, and in all things to glorify Jesus Christ.

III. Not Mature, but Maturing

A. The person who says, “I’m a mature Christian” probably ought to say, “I’m a maturing Christian”, because most of us have areas in our lives that still need perfecting.

B. Paul used the Greek word “teleios” (complete, finished) to describe maturity in the Christian life. “We proclaim him [Christ], admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature [teleios] in Christ” (Col. 1: 28).

C. He equated “becoming mature” (once again using the word “teleios”) with “attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4: 13).

D. We mature spiritually as we become more and more like Christ in every area of our lives.

E. When he trusted Christ, God replaced Paul’s self-righteousness with the righteousness of Christ, but he never lost the consciousness of what a sinner he was without Jesus.

F. The closer we get to the light, the clearer we see the dirt.

G. Paul also grew in his understanding of the grace of God. He always emphasized that we are saved by grace (Eph. 2: 8) and that we serve the Lord only by His grace (I Cor. 15: 9-10).

H. Paul never hesitated to remind his readers that there is no end to God’s grace and no way to measure it! God’s grace is incomparable (Eph. 2: 7) and glorious (Eph. 1:6); it had been poured out abundantly on Paul (I Tim. 1: 14).

I. No wonder Paul wrote, “But by the grace of God I am what I am” (I Cor. 15: 10).

IV. Keep Going, Keep Growing

A. Three times in his epistles Paul uses the Greek word “prokope”, which means “pioneer advance”.

1. In Philippians 1: 12 it describes the advance of the gospel into places in Rome where it had never gone before.

2. In Philippians 1: 25 Paul admonished the saints in Philippi to make progress in their faith.

3. Paul wrote to his associate Timothy, “Be diligent in these matters, give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress” (I Tim. 4: 15).

B. All Paul was looking for was mature spiritual development.

C. Our growing older doesn’t guarantee that we are automatically growing up. Age records length of life while maturity relates to depth of experience and character, no matter how old we are.

D. Our goal is “prokope”—pioneer advance, moving into new territory, discovering more and more of what we have in Christ and His Word.

E. The ministry of the local church is to “present everyone fully mature in Christ” (Col. 1: 28), and this involves hard work! “To this end,” wrote Paul, “I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me” (Col. 1: 29).

V. Spiritual Stagnation Leads to Conflicts

A. “Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches” (2 Cor. 11:28).

B. Paul’s greatest burden was believers, God’s own people and the trouble they can cause when they get out of the will of God.

1. The legalistic believers in the Galatian churches were “biting and devouring each other” (Gal. 5:15).
 2. The quarrel between two ladies in Philippi was in danger of splitting the church (Phil. 4: 2-3).
 3. Some of the believers in Colosse were designing their own brand of Christianity by blending the gospel with gnosticism, Oriental mysticism and Jewish legalism.
 4. Some of the believers in Ephesus were starting to live like the people who worshiped Diana.
 5. The problems in the church at Corinth outweighed them all.
 - a. The church was split four ways (I Cor. 1: 10-17).
 - b. Believers were using the public gatherings as occasions for showing off their spiritual gifts rather than for the edifying of the church.
 - c. Some people were getting drunk at church suppers.
 - d. Other members were suing each other before pagan judges.
 - C. They spent their time quarreling and competing (I Cor. 1: 10-11).
 - D. In spite of all the privileges God had given them, the believers in Corinth had stopped growing spiritually.
 - E. They used their spiritual gifts as toys to play with and weapons to fight with instead of tools to build with.
 - F. “Everything must be done so that the church may be built up” (I Cor. 14; 26).
 - G. By nature little children are competitive, selfish and demanding.
 - H. We read I Corinthians 13 and forget that it wasn’t written for weddings or funerals but for church business meetings.
 - I. Paul’s great desire was that the people in the churches mature. “Brothers and sisters, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil, be infants, but in your thinking be adults” (I Cor. 14:20).
 - J. For the most part, children focus on “What can I get?” while mature people ask, “What can I give?”
 - K. If they are to succeed in life, children must learn to be patient and obedient because they trust and love their parents, not because they might be rewarded or punished. God’s children have the same responsibility.
- VI. A Little Help from Your Friends
- A. Paul didn’t try to serve the Lord alone but identified himself with trustworthy like-minded men and women who assisted him in his ministry.

1. In Romans 16 he greeted by name some twenty-six people in Rome and sent them greetings from nine believers who were with him in Corinth.

2. In six epistles Paul included Timothy in his greetings.

3. Paul's brief letter to Philemon ("our dear friend and fellow worker") and Apphia and Archippus reveals the heart of an appreciative Christian who could not only win souls but also make friends and keep them. The letter closes with greetings from five friends who were sharing Paul's prison experience in Rome.

B. The Scottish preacher John Watson used to say, "Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a battle."

C. Paul made a ministry out of friendship, and we should follow his example.

VII. Suffering for the Lord

A. Paul suffered much during his ministry, yet it was his suffering that helped to keep him going. The Christian life is full of paradoxes. He said, "For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2Cor. 12; 10).

B. In times of pain and distress, we not only learn a great deal about the Lord, but we also learn more about ourselves and what God can do for us.

1. "We are hard pressed on every side," Paul wrote, "but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down but not destroyed.....For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body" (2 Cor. 4: 8-9, 11)

2. The paraphrase by J.B. Phillips says, "knocked down but not knocked out".

C. If I suffer by faith for Jesus' sake and depend on His grace, I will keep going and Christ will receive the glory.

D. To suffer for the highest Person---Jesus Christ---on behalf of the greatest cause---the glory of God---is the height of spiritual victory.

E. We still need the Spirit of God to give us encouragement and enablement far beyond our own ability. Strength ultimately becomes weakness when we depend on ourselves; weakness ultimately becomes strength when we depend on Jesus Christ.

F. "For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him but also to suffer for Him" (Phil. 1:29).

G. Why is it we complain and perhaps even rebel and argue with the Lord whenever suffering comes into our lives?

1. Instead of expecting trials, and being prepared to use them for God's glory, we resent them, hide our pain and ask God to change things immediately.

2. We should be praying, "Your will be done".

H. More than anything else, Paul wanted to reach the goal God set for him when He called him.

I. As William Penn the Quaker said, “No pain, no palm; no thorns, no throne; no gall, no glory; no cross, no crown.”

J. We must keep maturing in Christ or we won't be ready for either the suffering or the glory. If we don't keep growing, we won't keep going.