

Dear Friend,

Do you feel like you're no longer growing closer to God? Does your Christian life lack enthusiasm and excitement? Has your spirituality become dull and dried up? Several years ago, Matt McGill and Doug Fields shared this resource with me and I want to share it with you. These principles have proven beneficial in my life and I hope they can encourage you as well.

Healthy things grow; unfortunately not everything stays healthy. Sometimes Christians fall into a rut that keeps them from growing spiritually.

If you're in a rut right now, DON'T keep banging your head against the wall. Every believer falls into ruts . . . the question is what are you going to do about it?

We have identified some principles to help you climb out of that rut and continue growing today. And if you're not in a rut right now, these principles can help you avoid one.

Do more than just read through the following list. Think about each one and apply it to your own life. Journal on the principles you're having a difficult time with in your life. It's our prayer that these truths may be a source of hope and direction for your life. Should you ever want to talk to any leader in our ministry, just let us know—we want to help! On the backside of this handbook you'll find some information on how to contact us.

*Praying for your spiritual health!*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris", with a stylized, flowing script.

Pastor Chris



# Principle One: Save the Best for the Best

*"Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD,*

-Isaiah 1:18

*Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He (Jesus) went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.*

-Mark 1:35

Did you know the Creator of the universe wants to spend personal time with you? This is one of those appointments we should see as important. If you were going to a job interview, you'd show up prepared. You wouldn't be tired, or easily distracted. You'd listen well and do your best to communicate clearly. The same is true with time spent with God: show up ready to listen and learn. One way to help you get ready is to pick a time when you are at your best. Are you a morning person or a night person? Set aside your best time for the best person in your life: God. You may show up to math class tired, and if you did it all the time, you'd never learn. Why do we sometimes live out our faith like it's a class we don't like?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Principle Two: Consistency

*Give us this day our daily bread.*

-Matthew 6:11

You need to be consistent with the time you spend with God; once a month, or even once a week simply won't cut it. This principle is very easy to understand but difficult to practice. You'd be surprised at the number of people who complain of a stagnant faith, yet haven't read their Bible in a month, and then wonder why they're not growing. It's important to create a consistent time (even five minutes a day is a great start) and place, where you are comfortable, away from distractions, and is easily accessible. Quality AND quantity are important! Take a look at your time, how much are you wasting?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Principle Three: First Things Always

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

*I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place - unless you repent.*

-Revelation 2:2-5

This is one of the most important principles on this list because this passage was originally written on this issue of faith getting stuck in a rut. John's advice is simple and to the point: do the things you did when you first became a Christian. Remember the joy and excitement you had when you began taking God seriously? Remember the anticipation you felt right before you went to church or read your Bible--that feeling of, "I can't wait for this!" Leaving behind the "first things" is a sure way to remain in the rut. What were those first things you loved to do? If a Christian wants to avoid (or climb out of) the rut, he or she needs to do the "first things" always. Here's a great goal: live every day of faith as if it were the first day. Rediscover the "first things" you did to grow, and pursue them with all of your heart.

# Principle Four: Forgiveness

*Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.*

-Philippians 3:12-15

*Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.*

-Matthew 5:23-24

Don't feel guilty for missing past quiet times-- especially to the point of paralysis. The purpose of guilt is to move you closer to God, not the despair of moving further away. Every Christian makes mistakes, and guilt is the Holy Spirit's whisper inviting you back to the Cross for God's forgiveness. When you stumble in your faith, commit to "failing forward:" come to God and ask His forgiveness. If you become slack in your current devotional plan (you should have one, see below, the "Variety Principle"), don't try to "catch up." Just continue to move forward. Rest in God's grace, it is the only path for continual growth.

# Principle Five: Obedience

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

*So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'*

-Luke 17:10

There is an interesting and complicated relationship between our feelings and our actions. While I can't pretend to understand all of the intricacies of the how we were made, I do know that feelings and actions impact each other. Actions change feelings, and feelings change actions. Here is the truth of this principle: don't let the overwhelming feelings that come from rut-like spirituality keep you from obedience. Negative feelings shouldn't keep you from doing the good we already know to do.

## Principle Six: Anti-Ritual

*But the word of the LORD was to them, 'Precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little,' that they might go and fall backward, and be broken and snared and caught.*

-Isaiah 28:13

*Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them.*

-Matthew 6:1a

It's abundantly clear that God is concerned with the condition of a person's heart. There's a word that describes a person whose actions don't reflect their heart: hypocrite. God wants pure hearts, not falsified actions. He isn't looking for people who "act" good but aren't good on the inside. It is important for a Christian not to do things simply because it's what "looks good" or is the Christian "socially acceptable" thing to do.

Unfortunately, Christians are great shots when it comes to shooting their wounded. This creates an environment where people feel the need to be fake, fearfully hiding spiritual weaknesses. It's important not to do things when you don't feel like doing them. Don't ritualize your faith, turning it into a series of meaningless, empty actions. Just "going through the motions" isn't helpful for continued spiritual growth, and it doesn't impress God.



# Principle Seven: Variety

*I will sing a new song unto you, my God.*  
-Psalm 144:9

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Every Christian needs to create some kind of spiritual growth game plan. Mix up your routine, don't feel like you need to read the same book every time, or do the same thing. Here are several options (in alphabetical order) for what to do during your quiet time:

- Journal about a meaningful passage, exploring what God wants to teach you.
- Journal about your life, examining your actions.
- Journal your prayers to God.
- Meditate on a single verse or phrase, thinking about what it means.
- Memorize a meaningful verse.
- Pray out-loud or silently.
- Read a devotional book or commentary.
- Read a large portion of Scripture (two chapters or more), to get general ideas and thought flow.
- Read a small portion of Scripture, and carefully digest each verse.
- Silence: sit and listen t God.
- Sing praise songs.
- Write out major life lessons and reread them periodically to remember what God has taught you in the past.

Another aspect to this principle is where you do your quiet time. It's important to have a consistent place where you normally spend time with God. It is also good to have some special places (like a nature park) where you can enjoy God's creation.

## Principle Eight: Praise and Observation

*When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you. Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today.*

-Deuteronomy 8:10-11

*Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren.*

-Deuteronomy 4:9

People are great at getting used to things. We normalize our repeated experiences, becoming accustomed to them and often taking them for granted. Our mind creates patterns because they are essential for living a normal life. Without these patterns, it is impossible to learn from our past experiences. If we can't learn from the past, every situation is new. In a new situation, we lack confidence and quickness. For example, when you go to sit down in a chair, you probably just throw yourself into it without much thought. Now think back to the first time you discovered a chair (you were probably too young, so I'll refresh your memory). First observed other people sitting, next you grabbed the chair and tested its strength. Finally, you climbed up into it and began to relax, knowing it would hold you. After several successful attempts, you "stereotyped" what it means to sit in a



# Principle Nine: Diligence Without Doing It All

*...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*

-Philippians 2:12b-13

*You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain.*

-John 15:16a

Spiritual growth is a lot like water skiing. In order to ski, there are two basic, yet required, elements: the boat and the person. The boat clearly has more power and does most of the work, but the boat alone can't make a person ski. Although there's no comparison between the powerboat's engine and the skier's muscles, both are required elements. When it comes to growing spiritually ("skiing"), it takes God's power (like the boat) working in us, and our power to 'work out our salvation.' Many non-growing Christians either lack the diligence to do their part, or they try and do it all without waiting for God, without working alongside Him. Are you playing your part to grow in your faith? Are you trying to do it all on your own, apart from God?

# Principle Ten: Unequal Love

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

*...to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height - to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge,*  
-Ephesians 3:18b-19a

*For Your mercy reaches unto the heavens, and Your truth unto the clouds.*  
-Psalm 57:10

*But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),*  
-Ephesians 2:4-5

*Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.*  
-Philippians 1:6

Have you forgotten how much God loves you? We need that perspective. Remembering that God loves us brings everything else into focus in its proper light. When the big picture isn't easily or often remembered, things get out of proportion. Worries and dangers become more than what they really are, like frightening shadows in a child's room. Those shadows disappear with the light. God loves us more than we can possibly love ourselves and he's more concerned with our growth than we are. Take hold of this hope and be ready for his help. Have you remembered how much God loves you?





# Making It Personal...

## 1. Save The Best For The Best Principle

Have I been saving my best time for God lately, or do I normally give him the leftovers?

---

---

---

## 2. Consistency Principle

When was the last time I spent time with God? Do I regularly set aside time for him?

---

---

---

## 3. First Things Always Principle

What were the things I did to grow when I first became a Christian that I'm not doing now?

---

---

---

## 4. Forgiveness Principle

Do I have any unconfessed sin in my life that I need to deal with? Do I need to seek forgiveness from God or others?

Do I continue to grapple with guilt, instead of growing in God's grace?

---

---

---

## 5. Obedience Principle

Am I doing the good that I already know is right? Am I honoring God with my obedience?

Am I allowing my feelings to counteract God's commands in my life?

---

---

---

## 6. Anti-Ritual Principle

Have I become fake with my life, acting spiritual without being spiritual? Am I free to act without caring what others may think about me or have I enslaved myself to other's opinions?

---

---

---





# Making It Personal... (continued)

## 11. You're Not Alone Principle

Am I throwing a party of self pity, believing that I'm the only one who's experiencing a dry spiritual life?

Have I allowed this deficient thinking to isolate myself from others who may help me?

## 12. Movement Versus Position Principle

Am I so concerned with status that I've stopped moving forward in my faith? Am I caught up in pride and look down on others? Am I caught in a storm of discouragement and continue to put myself down?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---