

## **Essentials to Spiritual Growth**

### **Galatians 1:10-24**

Introduction:

The book of Galatians is a letter written by Paul to the churches that he started. He used his letters to provide spiritual encouragement and address issues in the church. One historian wrote that Paul's churches were between 15-100 people. Sometimes we get the idea that his letters were being sent and read by millions, but more by the dozens. One historian even suggested that Paul had about 2,000 converts in his 25 years of ministry. The churches Paul started were like his children, he didn't have natural children, and he was writing to give them direction, warnings, and encouragement.

***10Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ. (Galatians 1:10)***

We find in this letter a few things, first of all, we see that Paul makes it clear is that He doesn't need to win the approval of people anyone. He reveals that even though He used to be a people pleaser, he no longer was. Rather, He was passionate about serving Jesus.

As a Pharisee, Paul was highly esteemed. They were the athletes and recording artists of their day. He was fast climbing the ranks in Judaism and had a most promising career in Judaism awaiting him. He left an illustrious career where he had respectability to making tents, getting beat up, running for his life, fierce travels, and arguing with people that Jesus was the messiah, then starting small churches. The apostles were seen as the scum of the earth. He went from being the cream of the crop to the scum of the earth.

#### **What has our following Jesus cost us?**

Hopefully it's more than a couple Sunday mornings a month.

If it cost us nothing, we may not be following Him, just admiring Him from a distance.

**When we see Him and what He is worth, it doesn't even feel like a cost, but the best deal ever.** For Paul he never saw following Jesus as a price, but a privilege.

Upon Paul's conversion and redirection, those who had previously mentored him, now wanted to murder him. Those who previously befriended him, now wanted to behead him. His allies turned into his enemies. Jesus warned us that as people hated Him, those who follow Him will be hated, just for the association.

**Would you rather serve someone who will kill you when you sin against them or someone who would die for you when you sin against them?**

Jesus hanging on the cross contrasted the worst in the heart of man with the best of the heart of God. When the people felt Jesus sinned against them, they had him killed. When God felt that the people sinned against Him, He died for them (Romans 5:8). There are people who will kill you when you fail them. God will die for you when you fail Him. Who are we living for again?

Paul changed his doctrine and expanded his views, preaching a different message now, and his religious community not only ostracized him but were out to take his life. Yet, Paul was overseeing the operation of killing Jesus' most precious followers, he was a terrorist, and yet still Jesus died for him.

The story of the Prodigal Son revealed that the hearts of people will change, but the heart of the Father won't. As soon as his money ran out, the hookers weren't interested in him, the bars didn't want him around, the party animals replaced him in a heartbeat, but to his father, he was still most interesting, most desired, and absolutely irreplaceable son.

**We need to decide who we really want to please, those who will only be around IF... or those who will always be around NO MATTER WHAT.**

We know how into people-pleasing we are by the impact criticism and rejection have on us. How bothered are we by the opinions, attitudes, and words of people? How bothered we are when people don't like us reveals how wanting we are of people to like us. How much we enjoy the compliments usually reveal how much we hate criticism.

I think we need to grow to a place where we aren't extremely encouraged or discouraged by people. Not because we have protective walls and a calloused heart, but because we decided to stop finding our identity in people, and start finding it in God. Finding our identity in people is like building our house of shifting sand, let's build it on an unwavering foundation of His love.

**Perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18).**

- **When we find our identity in His perfect love, we no longer fear people.**
- **We fear people because we find our identity in their fickle love, not His perfect love.**
- **The more we feel safe with God, the less insecure we get around people.**
- **There is more emotional stability when we decide we are going to find our safety in God and not our security in people.**

**The one you are getting your identity from the most is the one you will try to please the most** (because that's the one you are afraid to displease the most.)

It's common for pastors to neglect the families and pour everything into their church, because they get most of their identity from the success and people of the church that the group they are most trying to please and most afraid to disappoint.

Paul was no longer going to live finding His identity in people, but rather in perfect Love, so He didn't have to fear people anymore. He wasn't living for their approval anymore.

**When we are looking for identity from people, we end up using people. When we are using people, we aren't loving well.**

- We can't keep using people for a definition of identity and sense of security. We need to get that from above.
- Jesus didn't let people give Him identity, his own family called him a lunatic, the leading influencers of his region called him devil-possessed, you better believe people called him a bastard-child all his young life. Some nicer people called him Elijah or John the Baptist 2.0. But, Jesus was not tuned into their voices: the good or the bad- because they were all incomplete, weak, and even poisonous. He was hearing the voice of His Father saying over Him, "This is my beloved son..."
- **When people are trying to find life in you, they drain the life out of you.**

- Have you met people and you know you can't give them too much attention/affirmation because you sense you are growing their appetite and it will grow so big you that the demand will be greater than the supply - and will end up disappointing them? They are getting too much life out of your attention and affirmation and you realize that it's draining you.

- **The less I find life in people the more I can bring life to people.**

- **The less I find my identity IN people, I can bring my true identity TO people.**

***10Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ. (Galatians 1:10)***

**I think the idea is that when you are in love, you don't mind making a fool out of yourself.**

While we were in college, I remember taking Meg to her favorite band in concert and I carried her all the way from the car to the concert, and it wasn't a short walk. Some dude was like, "You better not let my wife see that." She was a little embarrassed but deep inside she liked it. The point is...that I have game. No. The point is, that I was so focused on serving my girlfriend that I didn't fear what others thoughts.

We were taught in preaching classes that you want to get so absorbed in what you are sharing, that you don't have time to focus on feeling insecure. We are taught to let our passion drown our fears. That's what Paul is saying, that His passion has drowned his fears. Let's not let our fears drown our passions.

***"11I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. 12I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ." (Galatians 1:11-12)***

**This tells us that there may be belief systems that come from human origin and some from divine inspiration.**

- What is really of God should be the question we are asking. Jesus also made that distinction, he told the religious leaders that the uphold the traditions of man and render void that which is of God (Mark 7:13).

- What is man-made tradition and what is heavenly truth?

Could it be that... There are truths that we thought were divine, but were actually just man-made. Then there are truths that we may think are man-made, yet it's divine.

Paul had that experience, where paradigms were shattered, his systems crashed, his preconceived ideas (that he would die for and would kill for) were blown apart. What He thought was absolute truth wasn't. What he thought was an absolute fallacy was actually the most precious truth.

From Paul's journey, we see that there are teachings of man and the teachings of God, teachings from earth and teachings from heaven.

**We ought to be continual truth seekers. That's an expression of loving God with our minds, which Jesus commanded.**

Jesus taught us that if we would ask, we would receive, if we would seek, we would find, and if we would knock the door shall be opened to us. We out to be asking, seeking, and knocking for greater understanding of what's of God and what is not. So we can distinguish what's divine from what's human.

There were those who were criticizing Paul, that he was just parroting Peter and the other Apostles, but Paul makes it clear that he is not just copying someone else. He has had his own experiences, and He did his own homework.

We cannot settle for a second-handed relationship with Jesus. Paul was saying that he's not just an echo, he's not a parrot, he wasn't just a Peter or James wannabe.

He's received something from Jesus Himself. His messages wasn't something he just got by copying others, but seeking for himself. What a great example Paul is to all of us.

If people ask you, "Why are you a Christian?" And you say that it's because your family was. Well, were you ever introduced to other arguments? No, they insulated me from all those dangerous doctrines of demons. Have you ever had conversations with those who aren't Christian? Why should I talk to heathens?

That's a very weak witness because those who grew up in other cultures and within other persuasions will conclude that we don't question what we were served and we haven't sought truth for ourselves.

**“But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,” (1 Peter 3:15)**

We will be offering classes, ask questions!

A pastor I served under once said, “We didn’t feel the need to hide out kids from the world, because we trusted that the same God who revealed Himself to mom and dad, is well able to reveal himself to our kids as well.” If someone can talk you into something, someone can talk you out of it. Yet, if God gets a hold of your heart, it’s something that is difficult to walk away from.

God doesn’t want us to be indoctrinated by anybody and everybody, but people who are genuine truth-seekers.

**Some people get deeply offended and get hostile, when you ask them questions about their beliefs:**

- 1) That reveals that their doctrine is their idol, we should love and trust God, not our dogmatic beliefs about Him. (He’s bigger than our theological boxes anyways. We ought to be willing to die for Jesus, but we don’t need to white-knuckle secondary doctrinal issues.)**
- 2) It also reveals that we are insecure, for those who are secure in their beliefs, don’t need to have a hostile reaction to those of differing opinions.**
- 3) It also reveals that there is an unwillingness to dialogue and grow.**

Yet, we are called to study we are called to think, and there is a place for pressing in for more understanding.

**“He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.” (Acts 18:26)**

I like how even Apollos was teachable. Paul’s disciples Priscilla and Aquila, were able to help him refine his message even more. He was a dynamic orator, he was a scholar, yet, he was willing to learn from a couple who were tent makers.

There were times where people have met with me and shared their concerns or a differing opinion on why I could have been wrong. If there was too much pride, I would have missed the opportunity to learn.

We ought to allow our beliefs to be refined, we ought to be able to give reasons for what we believe, we ought to be able to have respectful debates with people, instead of crucifying those who present a different idea.

Paul wasn't just going to swallow everything Peter taught, he was going to search the Scriptures for Himself. He was going to seek God for himself. Then, when Peter was in error, Paul had no problem confronting him about it.

What happens when we never question what we have been taught when we were kids? If our beliefs haven't changed since seventh grade, something is wrong.

Greg Boyd, powerful encounter with Jesus. Debating with atheist father. Went to the university and took a biology class and read a ton of Christian books, and ended up walking away from being a Christian and back into atheism. But, He couldn't let go of Jesus, He couldn't walk away from the experience He had. His Christian friends told him not to take that class. But, he came out an atheist to his dad's delight. He felt so duped, brainwashed, and was angry with himself for it. He began to research for himself, day and night, who was Jesus.

Since then he's written thousands of pages defending that Jesus is God and was raised from the dead. He's debated people of other persuasions and religions in secular universities on why He is a Christian.

And since his faith was put in the fire, it came forth purer and since it faced resistance, it grew stronger. We need to be exposed to some germs and viruses to make our immune system stronger. You may be in a time of asking questions, and less certain, but you can still be committed.

**“Socrates said the unexamined life is not worth living. I think it applies to faith as well. The unexamined faith is not worth believing.” - Greg Boyd**

Greg Boyd wrote about how, “Not only this, but neurological studies have shown that the pleasure centers of our brain are activated whenever we encounter facts or opinions that confirm beliefs that are important to us. On the contrary, when someone confronts what we believe, it releases a FIGHT OR

FLIGHT REFLEX in our brain.” That’s why Christians, namely evangelicals are known to be very hostile when our beliefs are challenged. But the problem is that this has led to a learning phobia.

During the early 1600s, in the 30 Year War, between Catholics and protestants, the male population was cut in half in Germany and in some other countries because of religious wars. Up to 11 million died in bloodshed, and the population was only 500 million back then. We don’t like being wrong.

Jacob wrestled with God for himself and came out blessed and with a name change. If we wrestle with God for truth, we will come out transformed. God could have smashed him in an instant, but enjoyed the wrestling. It made Jacob stronger. We can wrestle with God over truth, and it will make our beliefs stronger.

- Isaiah 1:18, come let us reason together.
- Proverbs 8, we should seek truth and wisdom and cry out for understanding.
- Jesus frequently encouraged people to carefully search for truth and to rationally consider matters (e.g., Matt. 7: 7–8; Mark 4: 24; Luke 8: 18; 12: 24, 27; 14: 28–33).
- In Acts 1:3, it says that Jesus gave many convincing proofs of his resurrection.
- We are to be shrewd as serpents (not stupid).
- Following Jesus is not about shutting off our critical brains. Being a Christian is not about being self-delusional or intellectually dull. It’s ok to be inquisitive with God. There are so many questions being asked in Scripture, God may like questions.

Greg Boyd, got saved in a powerful Pentecostal experience, and yet was always a question asker. Yet someone told him, “Stop asking questions, faith pleases God...” But faith also looks like wrestling with God in the form of questions.

***13For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. 14I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. 15But when God, who set me apart from my mother’s womb and called me by his grace, was pleased 16to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. 17I***



***did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus. (Galatians 1:13-17)***

Paul entered into a time of solitude to refine His message. The three years in Arabia were so necessary.

**There is no substance without solitude.**

The higher we want to build, the deeper we need to dig.

The building is done in public, but the digging is done in private.

The secret to Paul's public success, was the private devotion. He was having long seasons of being tucked away and shut up. It's when we have really had some time alone, that now we have something worthwhile to say.

The people we enjoy listening to are the ones who distribute pearls, not popcorn. Pearls take time, popcorn takes two minutes.

If we spend all our time with people we can no longer help them.

QUIET, Susan Cain, she explains how introverts are often overlooked and gets run over by extroverts. Yet, she went on to say that introverts are powerful people too, even though they are less demonstrative and probably not the life of the party or those you would call natural-born leaders.

“Without introverts, the world would be devoid of: the theory of gravity, the theory of relativity, Chopin's music, Peter Pan, Charlie Brown, Animal Farm/1948, the Cat in the Hat, E.T., and Schindler's List.”

“Eleanor Roosevelt, Al Gore, Warren Buffett, Gandhi—and Rosa Parks—achieved what they did not in spite of but because of their introversion.”

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“I knew that in 1921 the influential psychologist Carl Jung had published a bombshell of a book, Psychological Types, popularizing the terms introvert and extrovert as the central building blocks of personality.

Introverts are drawn to the inner world of thought and feeling, said Jung, extroverts to the external life of people and activities. Introverts focus on the meaning they make of the events swirling around them; extroverts plunge into the events themselves. Introverts recharge their batteries by being alone; extroverts need to recharge when they don't socialize enough." - Excerpt From: Cain, Susan. "Quiet." Broadway Books, 2013-01-29. iBooks.

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Susan Cain writes that whether you are an introvert, extrovert, or omnivert, you still need to have times of solitude to become more creative.

We live in a world where people value production more than contemplation, but it is our times of contemplation that will bring greater production. It proved true for Paul, for Jesus, and for Moses. They all spent some time alone.

**18**Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days. **19**I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord's brother. **20**I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie. **21**Then I went to Syria and Cilicia. **22**I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. **23**They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." **24**And they praised God because of me.

There are purposeful delays in meeting mentors and divine connections. We are for solitude, but against isolation.

It's important to not become too isolated. You need people who are credible giving vouching for you. Watch out for the Lone Ranger.

What we see in Chapter 2 is that the Apostles in Jerusalem approved of Paul's message, and Paul was glad to hear that the same message he got was what they embraced.

Paul's associations and connections gave him credibility.