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Practice Makes Progress

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One of life's greatest frustrations is the unwritten natural law which states, "It is easier to lose progress than to gain it." This truth is evident in almost every area of life. We can spend 90 days losing weight, but it takes only 90 hours (it seems) to gain it back. We can spend 5 years mastering our golf swing, but 5 days off cripples our tempo (you golfers know exactly what I mean). We can take 6 years of Spanish in high school and college, yet without regular practice our vocabulary becomes limited to "sí, mas empañadas, por favor." Even at a young age on the playground, we learn the powerful life lesson that it is far more difficult to climb the ladder than to slide down the slide. Is it any surprise that the same principle is true in spiritual matters?

In [Mark 4:21f](#), Jesus instructs His disciples to make sure not to hide God's Word, but to take it out and listen to it often. "For whoever has, to him more shall be given; and whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him" ([Mark 4:25](#)). Have you ever found that if you spend a couple days away from God's Word, it feels like you've lost at least a week's worth of knowledge? It's easy for "even what we have to be taken away from us." It's easy to lose progress spiritually when we neglect God and His Word. We lose even more when we start following our own path. "Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsels and in the stubbornness of their evil heart, and went backward and not forward" ([Jeremiah 7:24](#)).

Let us not be discouraged by this phenomenon, but rather motivated to keep abiding in God's Word by reading it and living it. Understanding that it is far easier to lose progress than to gain it will help us stop rationalizing our lukewarm devotion with platitudes like "I'll just read double tomorrow to make up for it" (which can begin a terrible snowball of procrastination) or "I'll just say an extra long prayer tomorrow" (it's hard to pray to God twice as long when there is a day's worth of spiritual distance between us). When the apostle Peter listed the Christian virtues we should aim for, he prefaced them with the phrase, "applying all diligence" ([2 Peter 1:5](#)). After he listed the virtues, he said, "if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful..." (1:8a). God expects these qualities to be increasing in our lives. How can we make sure they never decrease? Peter concludes, "...be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you, for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble" (1:10b). Only diligent, daily practice makes progress.

That Weird Wife/Sister Story

Daniel Broadwell

Perhaps you are currently reading through Genesis to kick off a year-long reading plan. As you do, you'll notice an odd story that keeps popping up. On three separate occasions (twice involving Abraham, and once his son, Isaac), the same situation arises and the same action is taken. The three accounts are found in Genesis 12, 20, and 26, and they all go like this:

The man travels to a foreign land with his beautiful wife. Fearful that he might be disposed of, he tells the people that she is a relative (which is true) and conceals the fact that they are married. The ruler of the land takes the woman and blesses the man, until finding out the truth, at which point he rebukes the man and sends the couple away.

Two questions come up after reading this story over and over in Genesis: 1) **Why does this keep happening?** and 2) **Why are we told about it three times?** Allow me to attempt some answers.

Self-preservation is the strongest of all innate human tendencies. Abraham and Isaac felt threatened, and reacted accordingly. Never mind that God had promised that He was going to preserve and prosper them. Never mind that they had seen the situation unfold before and knew God had responded with displeasure. In the moment, 'common sense' said that these foreigners could not be trusted and that if they knew the woman was married they would kill her husband. Since their wives were also relatives, it made for a convenient solution that was not technically a lie. And, while the three accounts read so similarly to us, each situation surely seemed different to these men, making it easy to fall back on that strong, instinctive reaction of self-preservation.

Stories are told to us in the Bible so that we might see ourselves in them. Like the patriarchs, we often face a conflict between self-preservation and trusting in God. In fact, the gospel is the antithesis of self-preservation, which is why Jesus says "Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." (Matthew 16:25) But in difficult circumstances, 'common sense' and self-preservation often guide our decision making. If I don't go to this social function, I won't be able to advance my career—plus it's not a sin to go. If I spend too much money on other people, I may suffer financially down the road—plus it's not a sin to save. To live by faith, however, is to actively surrender our life and our will to the promises and purposes of God. **"Trust in the Lord with all your heart,"** Solomon said, **"and lean not on your own understanding."**

The Crown of Old Men

I am a rookie when it comes to being a grandpa but I am getting the hang of it. It has been a good number of years now since I have had babies and toddlers around the house. I don't move as fast or bend as far as I used to so, keeping up is a real challenge. That's why raising young children is a young man's responsibility. Proverbs 17:6 reads "Children's children *are* the crown of old men, And the glory of children *is* their father."

To see your child's household growing and watching them teach their children to know the Lord is a real crown of comfort in any man's life. The nation of Israel was the result of one man's faithfulness and the promises God made to him, Abraham. In fact God is identified often as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; Father, Son and Grandson. One man's faithfulness can lead to generations of faithful Christians to honor and praise the Lord. Think of it, if the Lord wills, one man's family become hundreds of faithful Christians. "Children's children are the crown of old men".

Consider what God commanded Abraham - "For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him."" Genesis 18:19 Paul wrote "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord." Ephesians 6:4 Raising children is hard work but that hard work and time of training can last for generations. What a thought and one to be taken seriously.

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