

HABITS (1)

Habits to help you keep going and keep growing

A. Introduction

1. Two things we are called to do as followers of Jesus are to keep going and to keep growing.

2. We are to keep going.

To keep going means that we keep trusting in Jesus and don't give up.

"Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain." (1 Corinthians 15:1-2)

"To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God." (Revelation 2:7)

"He who stands firm to the end will be saved." (Mark 13:13)

3. We are also to keep growing.

"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever! Amen." (2 Peter 3:17-18)

"...so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fulness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming." (Ephesians 4:12-14)

To keep growing means that we become more and more like the Lord Jesus.

This is God's purpose for us.

"For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers." (Romans 8:29)

This happens as we see Jesus.

"And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." (2 Corinthians 3:18)

4. It turns out that we keep going as we keep growing.

"Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever! Amen." (2 Peter 3:17-18)

The apostle Peter links our need to keep going (...and fall from your secure position) with our need to keep growing (but grow...).

But how do we keep going and keep growing?

B. We keep going and growing as God works

1. God keeps His people going.

"Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:6)

"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith." (Hebrews 12:2)

"Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come." (2 Corinthians 1:22)

"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away... And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day." (John 6:37, 39)

"I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no-one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no-one can snatch them out of my Father's hand." (John 10:28-29)

"To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy." (Jude 24)

God will ensure that those who are His will persevere in the faith to the very end.

2. God keeps His people growing.

"What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe – as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow." (1 Corinthians 3:5-6)

"May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it." (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24)

"For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers." (Romans 8:29)

God will ensure that those who are His will become like Christ.

3. But there are paths or channels through which God work so that we survive, grow, and flourish.

"They are appointed channels through which the Holy Spirit conveys fresh supplies of grace to the soul and strengthens the work which He has begun in the inward man... Our God is a God who works by means, and He will never bless the soul of that man who pretends to be so high and spiritual that he can get on without them." (JC Ryle)

So we are to walk these paths that God uses to keep us going and growing.

C. We keep going and growing as we work

1. We are called to keep going ourselves.

"We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away." (Hebrews 2:1)

"So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised." (Hebrews 10:35-36)

"But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life." (Jude 20-21)

2. We are called to keep growing ourselves.

"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them – yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me." (1 Corinthians 15:10)

"Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." (Philippians 2:12-13)

"Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come." (1 Timothy 4:7-8)

3. There are particular habits that will help us to do this.

"A habit is a behaviour that through regular repetition becomes almost an involuntary and instinctive part of our lives." (David Murray)

D. Habits to help us keep going and keep growing

1. These habits sometimes are called 'means of grace' or 'spiritual disciplines'.

"A means of grace is a tool or instrument that God uses to strengthen and nurture us so that we grow in conformity to Christ." (RC Sproul)

2. What are these habits, means of grace, or spiritual disciplines?

"Whilst there's no final and complete list of such practices, the long tally of helpful habits can be clustered underneath three main principles: hearing God's voice, having his ear, and belonging to his body. Or simply: word, prayer, and fellowship." (David Mathis)

"The 'means of grace' are such as Bible reading, private prayer, and regularly worshipping God in Church, wherein one hears the Word taught and participates in the Lord's Supper. I lay it down as a simple matter of fact that no one who is careless about such things must ever expect to make much progress in sanctification. I can find no record of an eminent saint who ever neglected them." (JC Ryle)

These three habits are present in Luke's summary of what life in the early church was like.

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." (Acts 2:42)

Having these three habits is actually a way of being Christlike.

"The Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens my ear to listen like one being taught. The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious; I have not drawn back." (Isaiah 50:4-5)

"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed." (Mark 1:35)

"Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom." (Luke 4:14-16)

3. An important reminder.

The aim of having these habits is not to become a skilled Bible reader, proficient at praying, or a faithful church goer.

It is to grow in our Christlikeness.

"And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." (2 Corinthians 3:18)

And as we keep growing it will help us to keep going.

So...

"May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." (Hebrews 13:20-21)