

“Gradual Spiritual Formation.”

Off The Top of My Head. April 12, 2007. By Dave Gibson.

I really like spiritual growth, I just don't like the way it happens. Spiritual growth happens slowly, in a process, in increments, in hard times, in painful conviction of sin, in dependence, in struggle, in exposure of my motives, in repentance, in confession, in wrestling with God and with myself, and in times of instability. Even when we know that the eventual outcome is good, these kinds of processes are not real appealing.

A friend recently sent me a poem that deals with this slow process of spiritual growth. I found it very helpful. Let me give this disclaimer: the author of this piece was a Jesuit priest with many and varied beliefs that I would not hold. That said, the content of this particular piece, as it relates to the process of spiritual growth, has some real value.

by Teilhard de Chadin

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.
We are, quite naturally,
Impatient in everything to reach the end without delay...
We should like to skip the intermediate stages.
We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new.
And yet, it is the law of all progress
that it is made by passing through some stages of instability...
and that it may take a very long time.

And so I think it is with you.
Your ideas mature gradually;
Let them grow, let them shape themselves,
without undue haste.
Don't try to force them on,
as though you could be today what time
(that is to say,
grace and circumstances acting on your own goodwill)
will make you tomorrow.

Only God could say what this new spirit gradually forming
within you will be. Give our Lord the benefit of your
believing that his hand is leading you, and of your
accepting the anxiety
of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete.

As spiritually growing people our lives are “in suspense and incomplete” as far as the final formation of Christlikeness in us. We are persevering through the times of instability. We are on the way to be like Jesus and the completion of that process will

only happen when we see Christ. In the mean time, we have the resource of God's enabling grace, if we will grasp it, to thrive and grow in this challenging process.

The pitfalls along this path of spiritual growth are legion: giving up, self-medicating, demands, anger, striking out at God, striking out at others, strategies to avoid pain, bitterness, fear, self-pity, denial, anxiety, impatience, spiritual attack, losing vision, losing hope, suspecting God and others of not caring for us, and pretending that life is foundationally about something other than becoming like Christ.

My son and I once climbed up a peak in Idaho called Mt Borah. At one point we were climbing along a knife edge ridge that was our only route and the wind was blowing so hard that I was holding on to my son for fear he would blown off the ridge. Spiritual growth often happens in high winds.

Keep climbing friends.