



3.

All investments require time to grow

(Becky)

I don't know a single person who would deposit twenty dollars in the bank today and expect to come back tomorrow and withdraw a hundred dollars. And I've never met anyone who thinks you can plant a seed one day and find a fully grown, fruit-filled apple tree a week later. For the most part, we realize these things take time and require work. A retirement fund and a kitchen full of apple pie and cider must begin with a few dollars and a few tiny seeds slowly and patiently given the attention they need to thrive and produce.

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Just as these monetary and horticultural investments gain value over time, so do relationships and spiritual disciplines. It is possible, I suppose, for the Lord to do a miraculous work of knitting hearts together quickly, but most of us would agree that the richest and most meaningful relationships happen when friends and loved ones faithfully contribute to each other's lives over the course of many years and especially throughout a variety of seasons. We might greatly enjoy the company of new friends, but we will cling to the trustworthy, tried-and-true long-term relationships when needs and difficulties arise.

This is a natural disposition. It doesn't require much effort to think of our closest friends. They are the ones who show up regularly, the ones we interact with most often, the ones who invest in our lives. But no one becomes that kind of friend just

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by deciding that's what they want to be and claiming the title. They earn the title by doing the slow, consistent work we just talked about. Showing up. Listening. Helping. Loving. And guess what is required of you if you desire to be that kind of friend and have those kinds of friends? I'll give you two guesses, but you'll only need one.

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That's right. You must show up. Listen. Help. Love. Consistently over time, you must invest in the people you wish to call friends. I am sad to report that I know more than a few people who spent their lives mostly focused on themselves and grew to realize later in life that they were lonely. Thankfully the Lord is powerful enough to redeem even this, and I'm grateful to have seen Him do so. But the best way to avoid such a fate is to start early in life and consistently find ways to show people you enjoy their presence.

In much the same way, spiritual disciplines are kind of like old friends. The more we invest in them, the more joy and transformative value they will have in our lives. Consider reading Scripture. It can be a daunting task to open a Bible for the first time, or even for the thousandth time, with very little understanding of what we're reading. But as we gradually and consistently spend time in the Word, as we read in 2 Corinthians 3:18, we are "beholding the glory of the Lord" and therefore "are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" (ESV). When we come to the Word of God, which tells us itself that it is "living and effective" (Heb. 4:12), with a humble heart and a submissive mind, every encounter with it over time contributes to a deep change within us. This is the power of the living Scripture. So even if you must start

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with brief moments and scattered thoughts, know that each one matters. Every minute adds to the foundation you are laying to support you for the rest of your life.

I am often still surprised by the way the Lord works through His Word. Having been raised in church and married to a man who speaks and writes and repeats the words of Scripture for a living, I have heard or read most of the Bible multiple times. And yet I am struck by something new every single time. As I grow and learn and fit more of the big picture into place, the details that I didn't understand, and the pieces that had no place to fit the first time I read them, now wonderfully adorn the ever-growing story that the Lord is telling me through His Word. And just like a puzzle gets easier to fill in and more visually appealing with each addition, the story of God's love for us does the same. Every new revelation delivers greater clarity and each moment of better understanding makes it easier to understand the next moment and the next and the next.

I don't know about you, but my favorite friendships are those that feel easier and more comfortable every time we spend time together. So much less work is required and so much more joy is shared once we have laid a foundation of understanding. This doesn't mean we don't continue to put effort into the relationship, only that it feels more natural and

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comes much more easily each time. Wouldn't you love your time in Scripture to feel the same way? However difficult it might feel to begin this practice, I truly believe it will become more and more natural and easy each time, and my hope is that you will find more and more joy in it as well. Begin this practice now so that even decades from today you can look back with surprise and delight to see the beautiful fruit this investment bears. I can say with confidence that I'm certain you won't regret it.

