Dear Friend,

Do you feel like you're no longer growing closer to God? Does your Christian life lack enthusiasm and excitement? Has your spirituality become dull and dried up? Several years ago, Matt McGill and Doug Fields shared this resource with me and I want to share it with you. These principles have proven beneficial in my life and I hope they can encourage you as well.

Healthy things grow; unfortunately not everything stays healthy. Sometimes Christians fall into a rut that keeps them from growing spiritually.

If you're in a rut right now, DON'T keep banging your head against the wall. Every believer falls into ruts . . . the question is what are you going to do about it?

We have identified some principles to help you climb out of that rut and continue growing today. And if you're not in a rut right now, these principles can help you avoid one.

Do more than just read through the following list. Think about each one and apply it to your own life. Journal on the principles you're having a difficult time with in your life. It's our prayer that these truths may be a source of hope and direction for your life. Should you ever want to talk to any leader in our ministry, just let us know—we want to help! On the backside of this handbook you'll find some information on how to contact us.

Praying for your spiritual health!

**Pastor Chris** 

# Principle One: Save the Best for the Best

"Come now, and let us reason together," Says the
 LORD,
 -Isaiah 1:18
 Now in the morning, having risen a long while
before daylight, He (Jesus) went out and
 departed to a solitary place;
 and there He prayed.
 -Mark 1:35
 Did you know the Creator of the universe
 wants to spend personal time with you?
This is one of those appointments we
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 should see as important. If you were going
 to a job interview, you'd show up prepared.
 You wouldn't be tired, or easily distracted.
You'd listen well and do your best to
 communicate clearly. The same is true
 with time spent with God: show up ready to
 listen and learn. One way to help you get
ready is to pick a time when you are at you
 best. Are you a morning person or a night
 person? Set aside your best time for the
 best person in your life: God. You may show
 up to math class tired, and if you did it all
the time, you'd never learn. Why do we
 sometimes live out our faith like it's a class
 we don't like?
 We don't like:

#### Principle Two: Consistency

Give	us	this	day	our	daily	bread	

-Matthew 6:11

You need to be consistent with the time you spend with God; once a month, or even once a week simply won't cut it. This principle is very easy to understand but difficult to practice. You'd be surprised at the number of people who complain of a stagnant faith, yet haven't read their Bible in a month, and then wonder why they're not growing. It's important to create a consistent time (even five minutes a day is a great start) and place, where you are comfortable, away from distractions, and is easily accessible. Quality AND quantity are important! Take a look at your time, how much are you wasting?


## Principle Three: First Things Always

 I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you
have tested those who say they are apostles and
 are not, and have found them liars; and you have
 persevered and have patience, and have labored
 for My name's sake and have not become weary.
 Nevertheless I have this against you, that you
 have left your first love. Remember therefore
from where you have fallen; repent and do the
 first works, or else I will come to you quickly and
 remove your lampstand from its place - unless
 you repent.
 -Revelation 2:2-5
This is one of the most important
 principles on this list because this
 passage was originally written on this
 issue of faith getting stuck in a rut. John's
 advice is simple and to the point: do the
 things you did when you first became a
 Christian. Remember the joy and
excitement you had when you began
 taking God seriously? Remember the
 anticipation you felt right before you went
 to church or read your Biblethat feeling
 of, "I can't wait for this!" Leaving behind the
 "first things" is a sure way to remain in the
 rut. What were those first things you
 <u> </u>
loved to do? If a Christian wants to avoid
 (or climb out of) the rut, he or she needs to
 do the "first things" always. Here's a great
 goal: live every day of faith as if it were the
 first day. Rediscover the "first things" you
 did to grow, and pursue them with all of
your heart.

#### Principle Four: Forgiveness

Not that I have already attained, or am already
perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of
that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of
me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have
apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting
those things which are behind and reaching
forward to those things which are ahead, I press
toward the goal for the prize of the upward call
of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many
as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything
you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to
you.

-Philippians 3:12-15

Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

-Matthew 5:23-24

Don't feel guilty for missing past quiet times-- especially to the point of paralysis. The purpose of guilt is to move you closer to God, not the despair of moving further away. Every Christian makes mistakes, and guilt is the Holy Spirit's whisper inviting you back to the Cross for God's forgiveness. When you stumble in your faith, commit to "failing forward:" come to God and ask His forgiveness. If you become slack in your current devotional plan (you should have one, see below, the "Variety Principle"), don't try to "catch up." Just continue to move forward. Rest in God's grace, it is the only path for continual growth.

### Principle Five: Obedience

So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.' -Luke 17:10
There is an interesting and complicated relationship between our feelings and our actions. While I can't pretend to understand all of the intricacies of the how we were made, I do know that feelings and actions impact each other. Actions change feelings, and feelings change actions. Here is the truth of this principle: don't let the overwhelming feelings that come from rut-like spirituality keep you from obedience. Negative feelings shouldn't keep you from doing the good we already know to do.

# Principle Six: Anti-Ritual

But the word of the LORD was to them, 'Precept	
upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon	
line, line upon line, here a little, there a little,' that they might go and fall backward, and be broken	
and snared and caught.	
-Isaiah 28:13	
Take heed that you do not do your charitable	
deeds before men, to be seen by them.	
-Matthew 6:1a	
It's about double along that Cod is as as as a	
It's abundantly clear that God is concerned with the condition of a person's heart.	
There's a word that describes a person	
whose actions don't reflect their heart:	
hypocrite. God wants pure hearts, not	
falsified actions. He isn't looking for people	
who "act" good but aren't good on the	
inside. It is important for a Christian not to	
do things simply because it's what "looks	
good" or is the Christian "socially	
acceptable" thing to do.	
acceptable thing to do.	
Unfortunately, Christians are great shots	
when it comes to shooting their wounded.	
This creates an environment where people	
feel the need to be fake, fearfully hiding	
spiritual weaknesses. It's important not to	
do things when you don't feel like doing	
them. Don't ritualize your faith, turning it	
into a series of meaningless, empty	
actions. Just "going through the motions"	
isn't helpful for continued spiritual growth,	
and it doesn't impress God.	
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## Principle Seven: Variety

 I will sing a new song unto you, my God. -Psalm 144:9
Every Christian needs to create some kind of spiritual growth game plan. Mix up your routine, don't feel like you need to read the same book every time, or do the same thing. Here are several options (in alphabetical order) for what to do during your quiet time:
<ul> <li>Journal about a meaningful passage, exploring what God wants to teach you.</li> <li>Journal about your life, examining your actions.</li> </ul>
 <ul> <li>Journal your prayers to God.</li> <li>Meditate on a single verse or phrase, thinking about what it means.</li> <li>Memorize a meaningful verse.</li> </ul>
<ul> <li>Pray out-loud or silently.</li> <li>Read a devotional book or commentary.</li> <li>Read a large potion of Scripture (two chapters or more), to get general ideas and thought flow.</li> </ul>
<ul> <li>Read a small portion of Scripture, and carefully digest each verse.</li> <li>Silence: sit and listen t God.</li> <li>Sing praise songs.</li> </ul>
<ul> <li>Write out major life lessons and reread them periodically to remember what God has taught you in the past.</li> </ul>
Another aspect to this principle is where you do your quiet time. It's important to have a consistent place where you normally
spend time with God. It is also good to have some special places (like a nature park) where you can enjoy God's creation.

#### Principle Eight: Praise and Observation

When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you. Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today.  -Deuteronomy 8:10-11	
Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren.  -Deuteronomy 4:9	
People are great at getting used to things.	
We normalize our repeated experiences,	
becoming accustomed to them and often	
taking them for granted. Our mind	
creates patterns because they are essential	
for living a normal life. Without these	
patterns, it is impossible to learn from	
our past experiences. If we can't learn	
from the past, every situation is new. In a	
new situation, we lack confidence and	
quickness. For example, when you go to	
sit down in a chair, you probably just	
throw yourself into it without much	
thought. Now think back to the first time	
you discovered a chair (you were probably	
too young, so I'll refresh your memory).	
First observed other people sitting, next	
you grabbed the chair and tested its	
strength. Finally, you climbed up into it	
and began to relax, knowing it would hold	
you. After several successful attempts,	

you "stereotyped" what it means to sit in a

### Principle Eight: Praise and Observation (continued)

chair. Before long, you're throwing yourself in to a chair without a second thought. Some actions need to become familiar if we want to live a normal functioning life. Our spirituality shouldn't become one of those things we get used to. Spirituality shouldn't be stereotyped. The Israelites fell into this rut (see the warning in Deuteronomy 8:17), and became complacent in their faith.
The antidote is twofold: praise and observation. Praising God means thanking Him for His blessings. Praising God for the good things He did in the past, will alert us to watch for them in the future. Waiting expectantly for God to act is a sure way to fight off spiritually devastating familiarity.
It is also important that we become careful observers. Keeping a close watch on our lives will prepare us to tackle the beginning stages of stereotyping our faith. Instead of waiting for the shipwreck, we can make important adjustments the moment we veer off course. Feeling dull and dried out? Tired of that same old thing? Start praising God today, and commit to keeping a close watch on your life.

## Principle Nine: Diligence Without Doing It All

work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasurePhilippians 2:12b-13  You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remainJohn 15:16a	
Spiritual growth is a lot like water skiing. In order to ski, there are two basic, yet required, elements: the boat and the person. The boat clearly has more power and does most of the work, but the boat alone can't make a person ski. Although there's no comparison between the powerboat's engine and the skier's muscles, both are required elements. When it comes to growing spiritually ("skiing"), it takes God's power (like the boat) working in us, and our power to 'work out our salvation.' Many nongrowing Christians either lack the diligence to do their part, or they try and do it all without waiting for God, without working alongside Him. Are you playing your part to grow in your faith? Are you trying to do it all on your own, apart from God?	

## Principle Ten: Unequal Love

to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height - to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge, -Ephesians 3:18b-19a  For Your mercy reaches unto the heavens, and Your truth unto the cloudsPsalm 57:10
But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), -Ephesians 2:4-5
Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus ChristPhilippians 1:6
Have you forgotten how much God loves you? We need that perspective. Remembering that God loves us brings everything else into focus in its proper light. When the big picture isn't easily or often remembered, things get out of proportion. Worries and dangers become more than what they really are, like frightening shadows in a child's room.
Those shadows disappear with the light. God loves us more than we can possibly love ourselves and he's more concerned with our growth than we are. Take hold of this hope and be ready for his help. Have you remembered how much God loves you?

### Principle Eleven: You're Not Alone

That which has been is what will be, that which is	
done is what will be done, and there is nothing	
new under the sun. Is there anything of which it	
may be said, "See, this is new"? It has already	
been in ancient times before us.	
-Ecclesiastes 1:9-10	
No temptation has overtaken you except such as	
is common to man; but God is faithful, who will	
not allow you to be tempted beyond what you	
are able, but with the temptation will also make	
the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.	
-1 Corinthians 10:13	
-1 Comminants 10.13	
And here we come to another aspect of	
the big picture worth remembering: you	
are not alone. There's not a mature	
Christian alive who hasn't faced (and	
overcome) a rut in his/her spiritual	
growth. Slow progress and no progress has	
been happening since the beginning of	
time, and will continue until Jesus	
returns. You canwith God's help, of	
coursepull yourself out of the rut. No	
problem you ever face will be too big for	
you and God to handle.	
you and God to handle.	

# Principle Twelve: Movement Versus Position

For we dare not class ourselves or compare
 ourselves with those who commend
themselves. But they measuring themselves by
themselves, and comparing themselves among
 themselves, are not wise.
 -2 Corinthians 10:12
 Comparison leads to trouble: when you
compare your own spirituality to
 someone else, you'll almost always lose.
 If you see the other person as less
mature, you become puffed up with
pride. If you see the other as more
 mature, you can become discouraged.
 Pride leads to laziness and is pure
 garbage (pride was the first sin).
 Discouragement leads to giving up. The
reality is that there will always be
someone "above" you and "below" you
 but this shouldn't affect our attitude
 since we are to always consider others
better than ourselvesno matter what
(see Philippians 2:3). Movement
 towards God is important, not one's
 position in relation to others. It doesn't
 matter how far you've run, just make
 sure you keep running.
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# Making It Personal...

1. Save The Best For The Best Principle	
Have I been saving my best time for God	
lately, or do I normally give him the	
leftovers?	
2. Consistency Principle	
When was the last time I spent time with	
God? Do I regularly set aside time for him?	
3. First Things Always Principle	
What were the things I did to grow when I	
first became a Christian that I'm not doing now?	
now:	
4. Faustinan ara Duin sinta	
4. Forgiveness Principle	
Do I have any unconfessed sin in my life	
that I need to deal with? Do I need to seek	
forgiveness from God or others?	
Do I continue to grapple with guilt, instead	
of growing in God's grace?	
5. Obedience Principle	
Am I doing the good that I already know is	
right? Am I honoring God with my	
obedience?	
Am I allowing my feelings to counteract	
God's commands in my life?	
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6. Anti-Ritual Principle	
Have I become fake with my life, acting	
spiritual without being spiritual? Am I free	
to act without caring what others may think	
about me or have I enslaved myself to	
other's oninions?	

# Making It Personal... (continued)

7. Variety Principle  Do my spiritual habits have any intentiona plans behind themplans that include a variety of practices and places?
8. Praise & Observation Principle Has my life become so good, so full of God's blessing, that I have forgotten to look to him? Do I praise God daily, thanking him for everything he's given me? Am I a careful observer of my life, looking for God's lessons?
9. Diligence Without Doing It All Principle Have I found and defined the balance between my part and God's part in my growth? Have I been diligent in my duty, while allowing God to work in my life?
10. Unequal Love Principle Have I lost sight of God's ultimate love for me? What role does God's love play in my life?

# Making It Personal... (continued)

11. You're Not Alone Principle	
Am I throwing a party of self pity, believing	
that I'm the only one who's experiencing a dry	
spiritual life?	
Have I allowed this deficient thinking to	
isolate myself from others who may help me?	
12. Movement Versus Position Principle	
Am I so concerned with status that I've	
stopped moving forward in my faith? Am I	
caught up in pride and look down on others?	
Am I caught in a storm of discouragement and	
continue to put myself down?	