

Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People
Chapter 10: What to Do When Your Light is Brighter Than Your Life
Pastor's Notes/Review

Ten weeks ago we started looking at ways in which God works in our lives to make us the people He wants us to be. It often begins with awareness that something isn't quite right in our life. This is followed by a "growing conviction" that we must change. It's at this point we need to make a decision to change, and following that, once again we rely on God to work change in our lives as we walk in obedience to Him. The scriptures say "*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.*" 1 John 1:7 That's really what this is all about – following after Jesus.

Over these past 10 weeks we've covered some serious areas of our lives. Some of them may have been no problem for us. Upon further examination, some of them might have caused us to make some changes. But there may have been one or two that seem beyond our capacity. We want to change, but we just can't seem to keep up with all that God wants to do in our lives. We are under conviction, but change isn't happening fast enough. If you've ever felt overwhelmed by all God is doing in your life, today's study is for you.

1. Don't Cover Up

The first thing we tend to do when we feel overwhelmed is to cover it up. That's kind of what Adam and Eve did in the garden – they tried to hide – they tried to cover up their sin. "Who me? – I wouldn't do that".

I remember the time when my brother and I were engaging in a "discussion" (that's a nice way of saying we were not getting along) and in the process a vase got broken. My mother had brought that vase from an overseas trip. So what did we do? We quickly put aside our quarrel and started to glue the thing together. And glue we did! I got to tell you, we did an awful job of putting it back together. There was glue everywhere. We tried, in vain, to hide the fruit of our mess.

We are good at pretending something is all together when it really isn't. We want to look good. We want people to think well of us. So we pretend to be what we aren't. We're covering up. We never admit to any sin or even temptation. Everything is always perfect. We are all wonderful, godly people. The only problem is it isn't true and deep down we know it... but we do it anyway.

Keith Drury put it this way. He said *pretending is the busy person's ultimate answer to spiritual growth. Simply act like these truths are something you long ago came to practice. Discuss these disciplines in a Sunday School class like you've practiced them for ages. Nod knowingly as the pastor preaches on things you've never even tried. Wag your head sternly when some sin is being discussed -- as if you've never even been tempted in this area. Presto! You have instant spirituality.* Only problem is, it's not real!

I'm not an expert in Alcoholics Anonymous, but by listening to those who have been involved with AA it seems that something that is emphasized a lot is honesty. Self-honesty in particular. Being able to admit to oneself that he/she has a problem. If we are going to grow spiritually, we need to own up to our condition instead of covering up.

Psalm 32:3-6a "*When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"-- and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found...".*

If you are having trouble keeping up with the work God is wanting to do in your life; don't cover it up. We may be able to fool others, but we won't fool ourselves and we certainly will not fool God.

2. Don't Give Up

The other thing we tend to do when we feel overwhelmed is to give up. "I can't do it". That is why the scriptures are filled with messages to persevere. In Joshua 1:9 God is telling Joshua not to be discouraged, that God would go with him. Many times we read in the book of Revelation that we are called to "persevere".

When we come to the realization that God is asking more from us than we are ready to give, it becomes easy to get discouraged and it's easy to give up; particularly when we hear one message after another

reminding us of areas that God wants to work in our lives. We just get started in one area and then another comes along.

But if you're hearing those messages from God, don't take them as rebuke – take them as encouragement to press on. It means God has an interest in your life, to see you become the masterpiece he has in mind for you.... But you can't give up.

Paul had the right idea in Philip. 3:12-14. He wrote, "*Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*"

How do you press on? You press on by focusing on the goal. Someone who is going to be an athlete in the upcoming Olympics puts a whole lot of time and energy into training. Day in and day out they train – hours upon hours. Why do they do it? Because they want to receive the prize. They keep their eyes on their prize. Hebrews 12:2 says "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus". It's the only way to press on towards the prize.

God has a prize for you. Actually, there are two prizes. We generally think of the prize as our eternal reward, and there certainly is that. Eight times in the book of Revelation it says that the one who overcomes will receive an eternal blessing. But there is also a prize we receive here and now.

As we live in obedience to God, as we allow him to conform us into His image, we have the blessing of being the people God intended for us to be. Sometimes I don't think we realize how important this is.

We were born to be in a relationship with God. Being in relationship with God isn't a burden, it's a joy because we were made for that. The moment we make the decision to follow after God, no matter what the cost, that's the moment we begin to truly live.

The song *The Wonderful Cross* captures this truth: "O the Wonderful Cross – bids me come and die and find that I may truly live". That is so true. The moment we die to ourselves; the moment we say to God, take my life, conform it to your image, make me the person you want me to be – that's when we are really living. If God has been speaking to you in one or more areas and you feel overwhelmed by it all; don't give up. The result will be worth any and all "sacrifice" you may have to make.

3. Come Clean

The only way to grow as a Christian is also the only way to become a Christian – and that is to come clean. The scriptures say that if we confess our sins God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

God's desire is not to condemn us but to restore us. The well known verse in John 3:16 says that "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." The next verse is just as important; "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him". That's God's desire for us. To save us. To restore us.

God wants to do so much more in our lives than we can even imagine. He has something in mind for you that is beyond your wildest dreams. You look at yourself and you see the flaws. You see the shortcomings. You see the sins. God sees them too, but he sees more. He sees what you can become. He sees what you were meant to become. And he works at getting you there.

Our natural tendency is to resist change. Sometimes we fight it. We get comfortable – even in our sin. That's a dangerous place to be. All you need to do is look in Romans 1:28-32 to see what happens when we get comfortable in our sin. We don't want to go there.

In Luke 18 two people went to the temple to pray. One was proud. He thought highly of himself. The other simply prayed, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner". Jesus said it was this second man who went home justified before God.

If you sense God is speaking to you about something, don't pretend everything is just fine when it isn't. If you see yourself falling behind in what God wants to do, don't give up on His work in your life. Simply come clean before God. Confess your sin. Repent (turn around). And allow God to work in your life. He'll do the work because he loves you – and he will carry it on to completion (Philippians 1:3-6).