

# Cycles of Growth

“I’m working on myself,” is a common phrase people say when they want to start improving something about their physical appearance, their emotional state, or their daily activity. The personal goals we make for ourselves change over time, and we all personally go through phases of decline, plateau, and growth ([sound familiar?](#)). Like the Life Cycles of a Church, our goals also have life cycles.

Last year, I made it my goal to lose some weight. I started a diet at the beginning of the year and had some great success with it for about two months! Then, I started getting busy...very busy. I lost the energy and motivation to continue because the progress I had made was adequate. So, I started reintroducing foods/drinks that I had previously been abstaining from. By the end of the year I was facing some depression and lost some motivation to continue, and even gained some of that weight back. The last phase is when we recognize that we need to “jump back on it,” and the cycle starts over.

In ministry, church leaders ought to be looking for ways they can improve their leadership. In [another podcast](#) we learned about some traits of a godly leader. Our whole lives are for learning, growing, and improving. This is not only our desire, but it is God’s desire through the Holy Spirit at work in us. The Holy Spirit has been given to us as a gift, to lead and guide us, to convict us of sin, and to give us boldness to be a witness for Christ. It is through the Holy Spirit that God wants to sanctify us.

## Sanctification - In Every Christian Life

The word “[Sanctification](#)” is related to our growth in conformity of Christ. God uses people, places, and the Holy Spirit to move us towards being *set apart* or *holy*. The Bible says, “Consecrate yourselves, therefore, and be holy; for I am the LORD your God. Keep my statutes, and do them; I am the LORD who sanctifies you” (Leviticus 20:7-8).

In the book [How Does Sanctification Work?](#) David Powilson says this: “The Christian Life typically lurches forward rather than marching uniformly in a straight line.” We were meant to grow. No matter what your goals are for self-improvement, we all need to recognize that change is coming – and we should be prepared for it. God’s sanctification will guarantee us that change will either happen with our willingness or without it.

I cannot tell you how many times in my life that I have suffered through a situation and questioned God, only to look back years later and realize how it produced a Godly trait in me. We are fortunate to know that we can learn from men and women in the Bible who sought some of the traits we will talk about in this blog. Speaking of biblical examples, Powilson also

says, “I am convinced that our understanding of the process of the Christian life is greatly enriched by considering multiple mundane examples, both in Scripture and in our lives.”

## Case Study: Paul’s Maturation

One of the ways we see this is in the life of Paul. Paul was not a perfect man. When Christ encountered him on the road to Damascus, it changed his life forever. But there was still some “renewing of the mind” that had to take place. When we meet him in Acts, he had been changed by Christ and started pursuing the apostolic call on his life. However, clearly Paul struggled with sin.

In [1 Timothy 1:15](#), Paul said, “This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: ‘Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners’—and I am the worst of them all.” He also explained his wrestle with his fleshly desires vs. the desire he had to serve God ([Romans 7:13-25](#)). But we also see his growth and maturation in his writing. Paul seemed to much more gracious and calm in the progression of his letters to the churches.

Galatians was [likely Paul’s first epistle](#). And you can clearly tell the difference between his first epistle and his last epistle. See if you can tell the difference:

*1:6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— 7 not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. 9 As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.*

Compared to his last letter: 2 Timothy 1:

*3 I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. 4 As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. 5 I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. 6 For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, 7 for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.*

Now, I’m not saying that the Galatians didn’t deserve Paul’s rebuke. But if you do a deep case study on the writings of Paul, you will see that as he progressed and wrote these epistles, he became more graceful, more patient, and more sympathetic over time. A great resource on studying this is N.T. Wright’s [Paul: A Biography](#).

# Traits to Change

No matter what you do for your own self-improvement, you will encounter hardships. But Jimbo and Bob have done a great job identifying the [5 traits that are necessary](#) if you hope to change anything about yourself. Most attempts of self-improvement will fail, if you do not possess the following characteristics. Here they are, with a brief description of each:

## Humility

Humility means acknowledging that you have room to grow and that others have something to offer. We can see the importance of humility in biblical passages such as [Ephesians 4:2](#), [James 4:10](#), and [1 Peter 5:5](#), which all emphasize the importance of humility. Bob notes that humility is the first touchstone for personal development and that being humble doesn't mean thinking less of oneself, but rather thinking of oneself less. He warns against assuming that one's presence alone will fix everything and emphasizes the importance of recognizing one's weaknesses and inexperience.

## Teachability

Teachability involves being open to learning from others, even those who may not have as much experience as you. The second ingredient for personal growth in replanting and revitalizing a church is teachability, which is built upon humility. Teachability involves being willing to receive feedback, instruction, and correction, even if it is painful. Proverbs 13:18 and Proverbs 9 emphasize the importance of heeding reproof and instruction in order to become wiser and more skilled. Without teachability, growth is impossible.

## Self-Awareness

Self-Awareness requires honest assessment (Romans 12) of your strengths and weaknesses, as well as your goals and motivations. Having a realistic assessment of your strengths and weaknesses, as well as an understanding of how others perceive you, can help you make more informed decisions and pursue growth opportunities that align with your abilities and interests.

## Integrity

Integrity is about being honest with yourself and others, avoiding excuses, and owning up to mistakes. It's important to be honest with ourselves and others about our progress and performance, and not make excuses for our shortcomings. When we take ownership of our mistakes and take responsibility for our actions, we demonstrate integrity and earn the trust and respect of others. This is especially important for leaders, who are expected to set an example

and inspire others to grow and improve. By being honest and owning our mistakes, we can become better versions of ourselves and gain the support and trust of those around us.

Check out [Your Future Self Will Thank You](#) by Drew Dyck for more on self-control.

## Initiative

Finally, initiative is the willingness to put in the work required to grow, taking action rather than waiting for others to prod you into it. If you want to grow, these ingredients are essential, and there are many resources available to help you develop them.

Personal development and growth require a combination of these five ingredients: humility, teachability, self-awareness, integrity, and initiative. It's important to be honest with yourself and others about your progress and to take responsibility for your actions. And ultimately, growth requires initiative and hard work, putting in the necessary effort to achieve your goals. There are many resources available to help with personal development and developing good habits, but ultimately, it's up to you to take the first step and put in the work.

For more information, check out the [Godly Leadership series](#) on our podcast, and read Eric Cofield's excellent [blogs](#) on the 5 Traits of Godly Leaders.