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INTENTIONAL ?

Making plans or resolutions for the new year? Experts say writing them down and talking it over with others makes a big difference on how successful you will be. Where does "spiritual growth" show up on your list? Growing is one thing, but healthy growth takes discipline. That's why people see physicians, farmers use ag advisers and businesses retain consultants. Diagnostic queries and tests help prescribe YOUR personal next steps. It may be uncomfortable or convicting, but it points the way to progress.

1- SPIRITUAL GOALS. Passages like Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3 talk about growing to be more like Jesus. Believers are re-born new creations in Christ who need to grow up spiritually, being transformed in heart, mind, and will. We have looked at "intentional healthy spiritual growth" for several weeks, with a few more to go. Today's questions are adapted from a helpful worksheet based on resources written by pastor Sinclair Ferguson. Start here: Have I understood that "Christ-likeness" is the goal of Christian growth? That God is determined to produce His life in believers? Is this MY personal goal too?

2- SPIRITUAL NOURISHMENT. Am I feeding my soul with good spiritual food? Am I being nourished on a regular healthy diet of Biblical teaching? Do I want to hear the Scriptures taught? And obey them? Am I eager to study the Bible myself? Do I read the Bible regularly? Do I receive its teaching as God's own Word? Do I apply His truth to my own life, to correct where I'm going wrong? And to train me in the right paths? Do I confess and repent of specific sins, turning toward God to walk in His ways?

3- SPIRITUAL EXERCISE. This involves worship, service, and witness. Am I increasingly devoted to public worship of God? And private devotion? Does my joy and participation increase? Are my time, talents, treasures and financial resources regarded as belonging to Christ, to be used in His service? Does my life shine as His light for the world? Is my life like preserving and seasoning salt in my home, family, and where I work, study, shop and play? Do I pray for and take opportunities to speak out for Christ? Have I a reliable assessment of the spiritual gifts Christ has given me for bringing His blessings to others? Do I know what these gifts are? Where and how to use them? Am I strengthening them so I can serve others better? Do I use my gifts without seeking my own self-advancement in the church?

4- SPIRITUAL ENVIRONMENT. Have I committed myself to and fitted into a Bible-teaching church? Am I aware of things in my own life and personality that may make it difficult for other Christians to worship and serve alongside me? Am I actively seeking God's grace to deal with my shortcomings? Overcoming a life dominated by pride or selfishness? Overcoming shyness that may be unwillingness to admit my needs? Do I count fellow Christians as more important than myself? Am I actively serving fellow believers? Do I appreciate the gifts of others and thank God for His grace in their lives? Do I overcome my pride that wants to allow only certain Christians to help me, or to be instruments of God's blessing to me?

5. SPIRITUAL OBSTACLES. Do I cope well with trials and difficulties, by God's grace? Do I trust God to work everything together for good to fulfill His purposes? Do I grow under pressure by relying on Christ to transform and bless me through difficult circumstances? Do I stand strong in His strength instead of collapsing in my self-reliance? Do I learn through dark providences, instead of simply being relieved when it's over? Am I becoming a more pure, gentle person? Do I love God's commandments? Do I have a settled proactive attitude to oppose anything that hinders God's work in my life? In my needs, am I being delivered from covetousness, envy, greed? In my desires, am I master of possessions and money rather than mastered by them? Do I find it increasingly possible to live without particular possessions?

6- SPIRITUAL WARFARE. Am I aware of activity of the enemy, Satan, without being obsessed by his power? Do I know tactics usually used against me? And Biblical resources to help me keep standing in spiritual attacks? Am I on guard against Satan? Am I daily seeking to 'put to death' the sin that remains in my heart and life? Do I seek daily to 'put on' the graces of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit?

Think about your answers to these questions. Rank your response 3-2-1 as mostly, sometimes, rarely. Regardless of your score, intentional healthy spiritual growth is dynamic. It takes discipline and effort to keep moving forward. Don't let shortterm failures prevent you from reaching longterm goals. Remember, it's all about living in the power of the Holy Spirit. An operational principle of the Christian life is "*the Spirit of God works the Word of God so the people of God become like the Son of God.*" Pray about your priorities as you seek to become intentional in 2017. Then get busy. Be intentional. Get growing!