

Dear members and friends of St. John,

One of the challenges of being a Christian is accepting the fact that our understanding of God and how He works in our lives is something that *He reveals to us in His good time*. As a young Christian, many years ago, I wanted God to reveal ALL of His truth and wisdom to me, and I wanted it NOW. Why should God delay in giving me all that I would need to be fulfilled? It didn't make sense. Wouldn't it be great if we had the answers to all things spiritual? Wouldn't it be great if we, with 20-20 spiritual vision, could clearly see everything that could harm us so that we could stay clear of those things? The path through this life would be so much better. Our relationship with God would be great. He would communicate through His Word and Spirit, and we would never be confused. Our relationships with family and friends would be guided by our wisdom and knowledge of the truth, so things would go smoothly. Why must we struggle in our Christian walk? Why does God reveal Himself to us slowly, and over time?

What I wanted as a young Christian was maturity. With maturity comes stability. And stability promises to drive out fear – fear of the unknown, fear of the future. To achieve this, I started by attending my first Bible study. I remember being afraid that I was going to look stupid, because I didn't know as much as everyone else. But I was even more concerned that, failing to study and grow in God's Word, I would end up being ignorant of God for my whole life. So I took the plunge. And God was faithful in helping me to understand what He was really like, and what He wanted for me. He was faithful, but the process was slow. Very slow. In that first class, I learned about grace. God's perfect love for us. Then why was life filled with hardship and pain? If God is love, why aren't things better for Christians than for non-Christians? I had a lot of questions, and that first class didn't answer them – it didn't even come close. So I took the next class. And the next. Years went by. I was growing, but slowly. God had not given me my wish – a quick, and complete growing of the knowledge and wisdom of God. I had to struggle – I had to work at it. Sometimes what I thought I had straight in my mind, was contradicted by something that I learned in my latest study. I was constantly struggling with His word and clarifying what I thought I had already learned. But each time I struggled, there was a blessing hidden in that struggle.

Call me dumb if you like, but it took me years to grasp what was God's plan for me and every other Christian on the face of the earth: ***the Christian life is all about the struggle***. Jesus came to a world torn by sin. He struggled with the people around him who refused to listen to the truth. They rejected His message and He wept for them (see Matthew 23:37-39). Even though He came to die for our sins, He struggled with His Father's plan of salvation – the cross. In the Garden of Gethsemane, three times He prayed that the cross might be avoided. But the Father's plan was the only way that we could be saved. In Jesus taking on our sin, and giving up His life, we have new life. And this new life is filled with struggle. Even if our knowledge of God's law was perfect and complete, our sinful human nature would still cause us to stumble and fall. So, we struggle with sin, and *in that struggle*, we receive God's power – His strength. He blesses us by turning us away from sin, and points us to the cross of forgiveness. **He's at work in us!**

And what about those human afflictions and times of suffering? Remember St. Paul's 'thorn in the flesh'? Three times, Paul went to God and asked Him to remove that problem – that struggle that

he was experiencing with his body. God's answer was, "*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness*" (2 Cor. 12:9). Paul's response to this answer from God (which in essence is 'get used to it, because I can work in you through it') was: "*I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*" Paul's struggle with his own affliction released God's power in him. And our struggle with affliction or sin allows God to work in us!

I realized years later that if I had all the knowledge and wisdom of God, I wouldn't need Him anymore. I wouldn't need to come to church to listen to the pastor, because I would know everything and more than he knew. I wouldn't need to pray, to cry out in times of difficulty – because God would have already given me all the help that I would ever need. I would be self-reliant, and in the process, would have **lost the very power and wonder of God working in my life.**

Now some may misunderstand this to mean, "If I've got to struggle, than forget it. I'll just attend worship. That's enough." In doing so, you're missing out on God's perfect power. You won't experience the wonder of seeing the revelation of God's word unfold before your eyes. In short, your faith will be weakened, and you'll miss out on the power that God has to help you grow. God's response to you is, "*seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you*" (Matthew 6:33). In other words, get in God's Word – make it your first priority in life – and watch God work in your life and give you all that you need.

Some of you might be thinking, "I've learned everything I can learn from the Bible – I know it well enough." Well, know this: your pastor is still growing in the Word daily. I still learn each week amazing things about God in my life. Do you think you really know all there is to know?

The root problem, seen in our callousness toward growing in Christ, is a rebelliousness toward our Lord. Can you actually claim that you want God to control every aspect of your life? Be honest! Growing in wisdom and knowledge is a **struggle**, and now we find out that sin is at the heart of it. Each day we struggle with sin. **This all leads to one resounding truth: *the Christian life is all about the struggle!*** God has provided for you a Christian home (St. John) where the Word is preached and taught, the Sacraments are correctly administered, and fellowship opportunities allow us to share our faith and serve our neighbor. God strengthens us to turn from sin, especially the sin that prevents us from wanting to grow into Him, who is the Head. "Seek first the kingdom of God" by worship and Bible study and service to your neighbor, and you can be assured of this: God will provide everything that is needful, today, and forevermore.

Pastor Travis