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## 20 Ways to Build a Stronger Spiritual Life

The challenge of these days, when times are not hospitable to spiritual growth, is how to nurture, feed, heal, restore, and renew the soul. Here are 20 practical suggestions for building a stronger spiritual life.

1. **Be a river, not a swamp.** The Bible says: "Rivers of living water will flow from the heart of those who believe in me" (John 7:38, margin).<sup>\*</sup> Remember, it is the mountain stream that carries fresh, life-giving water because it flows out. However, the swamp is stagnant and life-devouring. A swamp collects and retains water that comes its way. Don't be the kind of person who seeks to accumulate much before allowing a little to flow through. As Christians we are to let blessings flow through us and on to others. When we hoard and dam the blessings in our lives we are in danger of becoming spiritually stagnant, emotionally detached, and intellectually cynical. Resolve to break up the dam and let blessings flow like a river. The freshness is in the flow.

2. **Be like Moses-speak words of blessing.** One of the most beautiful and compassionate passages in the Bible contains these words of blessing pronounced by Moses: May the Lord bless you and protect you. May the Lord smile on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord show you his favour and give you his peace (Numbers 6:24-26). Get creative with language, and speak words that will uplift, encourage, hearten, and bless other people. As you build them up, your own spirit will get stronger.

3. **Nurture a shared prayer life.** Increase the amount of time you spend in prayer by sharing in prayer with others. Some ways to do this include: Letting friends know you are always available for prayer. Attending regularly held prayer groups. Participating in a prayer chain.

4. **Take a step of faith.** Spiritual growth means taking a leap of faith from time to time. Rather than trying to get everything in place before you start something important, why not follow God's leading and allow the plan to evolve? This means taking a step of faith and trusting God to provide what may be needed for success.

5. **Restore someone's faith.** Today, make time to heal a wounded heart, to extend kindness to someone who really needs a friend, or to help gather up pieces of a broken dream. Today, do whatever you can to radiate God's unconditional love.<sup>6</sup> **Be a grateful person.** Start every day with a morning prayer of gratitude to God for the gift of a new day. Do this even if the day ahead appears ominous. Conclude every day with an evening prayer of gratitude to God for the gift of the preceding hours. Do this even if you've had a very tough day.

7. **Serve.** Look for ways to serve the community, especially tasks that promise no reward, such as picking up litter on the streets. Read and reflect on the action of Jesus in John 13:1-5.

8. **Cultivate a little solitude.** "Solitude makes us tougher toward ourselves and tenderer toward others; in both ways it improves our character," noted philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. Spend some time away from the crowd and the noise of life. Set aside a few minutes to be alone-just you and God. In quietness we turn our minds away from the problems of life and fix our thoughts on the mind of God.

9. **Fast and pray.** Prayer linked with fasting was often done by people in the Bible. Ezra 8:23 reports: "So we fasted and earnestly prayed that our God would take care of us, and he heard our prayer." The next time you are asked to pray urgently for someone in difficulty, consider combining your praying with some fasting.

10. **Use it or lose it.** God has generously endowed each of us with unique gifts and talents. Make use of them or you will run the risk of losing them. "Use your gifts faithfully, and they shall be enlarged; practice what you know, and you shall attain to higher knowledge," noted nineteenth-century poet Sir Edwin Arnold.

11. **Turn worries over to God.** This is a clear teaching of Scripture: "Give your burdens to the Lord, and he will take care of you" (Psalm 55:22). Do this each time a worry crops up

12. **Spread love wherever you go.** That is the advice of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who advised: "Spread love everywhere you go: First of all in your own house. . . . Let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier. Be the living expression of God's kindness; kindness in your face, kindness in your eyes, kindness in your smile, kindness in your warm greeting."

13. **Keep your priorities straight.** Know what is ultimately important and what is not. Consider the words of former President George Bush: "I am blessed with a close and wonderful family, and I want to spend the rest of my life letting them know how much I love them and appreciate them," he said. "One of my most important accomplishments, one I am still working on, is to be a huge success in the grandfather business. I would like to be remembered for integrity, service, and family."

15. **Meditate on Scripture.** The Bible is loaded with verses of comfort, encouragement, and wisdom. Make it a habit to read and study your Bible in a regular, disciplined way. Highlight verses that speak to you. Meditate on those words. Memorize some of the passages so you can recall them from memory at a future time.

16. **Be reliable.** Do what you say you will do-whether it's convenient or not. Follow through on all of your commitments, large and small. By your actions, show others you are a person who can be trusted and counted upon.

17. **Spend time in nature.** This was something done by the psalm writers, and they gleaned spiritual lessons from their time in nature. "The heavens tell of the glory of God. The skies display his marvellous craftsmanship" (Psalm 19:1). "When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers-the moon and the stars you have set in place-what are mortals that you should think of us, mere humans that you should care for us?" (Psalm 8:3,4). "Mountains rose and valleys sank to the levels you decreed. Then you set a firm boundary for the seas, so they would never again cover the earth" (Psalm 104:8, 9).

18. **Strive for excellence.** The Bible tells us: "Whatever you do, do well" (Ecclesiastes 9:10). Be the best that you can be at whatever station in life God has placed you.

19. **Identify blessings.** Too often we go through life oblivious to the good that comes flowing into our lives. Try this spiritual exercise for one week: At the end of the first day, identify a blessing that came to you from a family member. At the end of the second day, a blessing from a neighbor. Third day, from a friend. Fourth day, from a work colleague. Fifth day, from a stranger. Sixth day, from a child. On the seventh day, a blessing that came from an "enemy."



20. **Exercise your power of choice.** No matter what happens to you, you always have the freedom to choose. You can select joy over despair. You can select love over hate. You can select forgiveness over revenge. You can select growth over stagnation. Remember that a crisis can evoke the best in us or the worst in us. **The choice is ours!** –