Spirituality
Soul Seeing



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One day I said to God, "Lord, I've been with you all these years. If I haven't been transformed by now, when honestly desiring and working toward that, then what's

the point? This belief system is worthless to me."

I had a theological problem. Jesus stated in John 14 that he would send the Advocate, who would teach believers. St. Paul said in Romans 8: "If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through his Spirit that dwells in you."

I had been walking with Jesus for decades, which meant that the Holy Spirit had been dwelling in me for decades. So why was I such a failure at spiritual growth? Had the Holy Spirit failed to work in my life? If the Holy Spirit and I had failed for decades, then it would make sense to give up the faith.

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Or — and it took me a while to ask this question — had the Holy Spirit been working in my life all along, but I expected the results to look different? Was I so conditioned by a middle-class, white, American religious culture that I could not see my own spiritual progress? By cultural standards, my spirituality was not successful enough, happy enough or trouble free enough. It was not productive enough or attractive enough. My Christian character was not extroverted enough.

Maybe the spiritual failure was this: My awareness of God's work had been prevented by specific expectations and a perverted concept of humility. Perhaps in my habitual inclination to go running back to a place of fear and condemnation (again, hear Paul say, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"), I had equated humility with self-loathing, albeit clothed in self-righteousness, and with a refusal to acknowledge divine work in my life. Wasn't it wrong to speak well of myself, arrogant to claim myself transformed, a person within God's approval?

I can identify only a couple of Christians over the years who were willing and happy to celebrate their ongoing process of spiritual vitality and maturing. More typical is for people to rejoice in something going well only to quickly interject that they had nothing to do with it because they were just sinful humans and relied on God to do everything. If this was the way I saw myself — an empty human who must wait for God to send worthy contents by the day and hour — then it made sense that I not

have confidence in myself as a holy work-in-progress.

Somehow, I had lost the concept that almighty God has, from the very beginning, invited humans to participate in divine deeds and Christlike character. How often I've quoted that we are "made in God's image"; yet how habitually I've acted like someone still in need of the divine stamp. From there it's a natural progression to spiritual passivity and helplessness.



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Furthermore, it was lunacy to keep returning, in my perception, to a starting point of faith, as if every day I must begin all over again. We don't do this with school children, but keep building on what they have learned. We pass them into the next grade when it's time. As a writer, I need not review basic grammar when I sit down to write because decades of writing have made that unnecessary. Yet, in my spiritual life, I seemed to believe that every experience must start with I-am-a-sinner-and-can-go-no-further-until-I-confess, that God insists on taking me through the baby steps although I was well past babyhood.

I chose to stay in the faith, but that meant that I must reject the former way of thinking. I'm still learning how to acknowledge and enjoy the wisdom that has grown in my life, the healthy qualities that become more developed every year I live. When I face a problem or hardship, I am more likely to ask, "Okay, Spirit, what have I already learned that I need to remember now? How have you prepared me for this moment?" than to send a desperate "Help! Give me something!"

I'm getting better at noticing my own spiritual growth. I'm getting better at trusting my spiritual growth, also my spiritual intuition. At any moment, I have far more interior resources than I need — because God has made a home in me.

I call this spiritual confidence. I trust that God's dwelling in me makes a difference every moment of every day. I continue to learn how to discern the best thing to do and to be free and willing to do it — that's my participation. But my capacity to learn is created by the Spirit already active in mind, heart, body and soul.

Spiritual confidence does not lead to arrogance — it leads to gratitude. I generally don't suffer an inflated view of my own importance because I don't have to try to be important. I am God's beloved, so why would I need to strive for importance or power or fame? In becoming more secure in that belovedness, I am simply grateful. Furthermore, I can look forward to this day, and the next. I don't have to fear failure or store up shame or generate false humility; my task is to pay attention and collaborate with the divine, who is faithfully at work in me.




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I'll take this a step further. Given that Jesus' life, death and Resurrection accomplished what God intended, and given that God dwells among us and in us through the Holy Spirit, why not expect that things will go well? Unless I rebel and actively turn away from God's ways, I should look forward to a life that both God and I enjoy. I can assume that I am always moving toward God's eternal perfection and peace. A mistake here and there, a rough patch because the world has its problems, some lost time because I stayed in a mood for a while — none of that budges the compass needle off true north.

Spiritual confidence is my trust that God is relentlessly at work. More specifically, I can be spiritually confident that the Holy Spirit is always speaking to me, working

within me, developing all manner of wonderful spiritual qualities and enabling me to see all things with the eye of my soul. Within myself to live and grow wisdom, truthfulness, discernment, goodness, gentleness, righteousness and hope because this is what happens to a person in whom God's Spirit dwells.

When I speak as if I'm just a sinner and a constant spiritual failure, I insult the Holy Spirit. I count Jesus' work as nothing. I deny a profound truth grounded in healthy theology. I refuse to embrace what God has given me: the Advocate who teaches me, helps me remember what I have learned so far and continually builds character that is becoming a person in Christ.

Perhaps the most important confession I can make is that I have often failed to acknowledge this interior re-creation. I still grieve my capacity for self-centeredness. But now I confess how much I have grieved the Holy Spirit in me by remaining blind to the daily grace of indwelling. How sorrowful life becomes when I am silent and joyless in the presence of this stunning reality.