

Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments." "Which ones?" he inquired. Jesus replied, "'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, ¹⁹ honor your father and mother, ^{1c} and 'love your neighbor as yourself. ^{1d}'" "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?" Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth Matthew 19:16-22 NIV

This story, found in Matthew, Mark and Luke has some different details, but always the same "punch line". The young man for all his desire for what we might call today, a rich spiritual life became shocked and dumbfounded when he learned what that really meant. First of all the progress he so desperately wanted came on Jesus' terms and not his own. Secondly, he would have to give up his "comfort" zone as man who appreciated the "finer things" in life. For this man he had to make a real change in his lifestyle to get what he most deeply wanted. While indeed the issue before us here is his great wealth, the truth of this story extends far greater than just issues of money and wealth. It is in those two propositions underlying the problem of the rich man's wealth: 1. willingness to grow in our relationship to God according to God's term rather than our own. 2. To get us there God might happen to take us out of our comfort zone, and more than likely we probably won't like it.

Now I am not saying that God works that way all the time, but we really need to understand that God could put us in the rich young ruler's shoes when we ask God for "growth in our faith" or "deepening our spiritual life".

Let me give you an example from my life. A few years ago when I was a conference dean in my former synod, I felt there needed to be a minister's lectionary group both for fellowship, and to exchange ideas and information to help us prepare for the scripture texts for the coming Sunday in worship. The best day for us all was Tuesday. It wasn't my best day, I just started the week after taking Monday off, and right after the lectionary group would be meeting there was an adult bible for my parishioners. It also gave very little time to touch base with the church secretary. It wasn't easy. I am a bit of a schedule freak, so I didn't like to be frazzled by a bit of running around. I was out of my comfort zone. But I preserved realizing that this was something that God wanted for us who could gather and greatly benefit from our different insights into the scripture. The group turned out to be a real gift from God. If I had not been willing to let God do it God's way, and give up control of my schedule, I really would have missed out on a real place of blessing and growth in my life.

Believe me I am just citing one time in my life, I can assure you there are others.

So what if you prayed to the Lord "Lord I want to grow in my spiritual life" What if God said "My child you must make a regular commitment to worship" Maybe you might say "But Lord, Sunday is the only time I sleep in, and Saturday doesn't fit my schedule." Then you may be in same place as the rich young ruler. Or what if God said in response to that same question "Increase your giving to my work" But Lord, you might say, that's asking a lot I don't really think I have the money". Then again you may be in the place of the rich young ruler. I think you could "fill in the blank" with many other things in our lives we don't want to let go of or be taken out of our comfort zone and you would be in the place of the rich young ruler.

God loves you and will never stop loving you, and through the riches of his mercy and grace He wants to bless us, not curse us. But if we want deep in our hearts to grow closer and deeper in our commitment or walk with God, we'd better be prepared that to get to that place God may be requiring something of us that will really, as the saying goes "rock our world".