

January 2008 – *Growing Up Spiritually*

Small children need training wheels in order to safely learn to ride a bicycle. However, at some point, the wheels must be taken off for the learning to become complete. Something similar is true in our relationship with God. Early in our spiritual life, it seems that God encourages us with a palpable sense of His presence. But at some point, our continued growth requires that He deal with us in a different way. This was not lost on C.S. Lewis, and he tells us about it through the voice of Screwtape:

Merely to override a human will (as His felt presence in any but the faintest and most mitigated degree would certainly do) would be for Him useless. He cannot ravish. He can only woo. For His ignoble idea is to eat the cake and have it; the creatures are to be one with Him, but yet themselves; merely to cancel them, or assimilate them, will not serve. He is prepared to do a little overriding at the beginning. He will set them off with communications of His presence which, though faint, seem great to them, with emotional sweetness, and easy conquest over temptation. But He never allows this state of affairs to last long. Sooner or later He withdraws, if not in fact, at least from their conscious experience, all those supports and incentives. He leaves the creature to stand up on its own legs—to carry out from the will alone duties which have lost all relish. It is during such trough periods, much more than during the peak periods, that it is growing into the sort of creature He wants it to be. Hence the prayers offered in the state of dryness are those which please Him best.... He cannot “tempt” to virtue as we do to vice. He wants them to learn to walk and must therefore take away His hand; and if only the will to walk is really there He is pleased even with their stumbles. Do not be deceived, Wormwood. Our cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending, to do our Enemy’s will, looks round upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys.¹

Yes, the time comes when the seeming absence of God is exactly what we need in order to grow to know Him better. When the “training wheels” of feeling come off, we begin to learn how to walk by faith, not sight—wobbly at first, to be sure, but gaining strength as we continue. And continue we must—to pray, trust, and obey, even when God seems a million miles away. As we do, we will grow into a trusting, obedient relationship with God, which does not require feelings or experiences. These may well return, but when they do it will be different: we can enjoy them, but will no longer depend on them for our faith to be strong.

...for we walk by faith, not by sight.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:7 (ESV)

¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), pp. 39-40.