

Double-Down

If you thought knowing Jesus was an easy-breezy cruise on an open sea, not so fast, sailor. Ya better think it through. Some folks may have preconceived notions that don't work out the way they imagine.

Okay, it's a thing. It may come down that way. One reaction is to walk away. Just quit, saying, "Well, that didn't work." Before you leave, take another look. You owe yourself that much.

Word. When things get hard, *double-down*. The *thing* is a common method God uses to help you make the transition from an outlook that catered to the self-centered dude who ran your life into the road block that brought you to Jesus in the first place.

So now you're confused. That's normal. Remember the real way God redirected you from the negative stuff dragging you down? The never-before-peace you felt? It's real too.

There's a big difference inside now that He lives in you; a spiritual reality which helps see the world from God's point of view. It's a gut level awareness of basic changes. See, a new innocence has been restored. "*Born again*" is what Jesus called it.

It's a bit like Saturday morning, and you're a kid, waking up, knowing there's cartoons to be watched and corn flakes in the kitchen. You trust without doubting, having confidence in parents who love you is the reality you lived with. As you age a few years, things became more complex. Life wasn't

so simple anymore. In fact it grew more complicated every day.

Many people didn't have such happy circumstances—a secure, healthy environment growing up. Life was hard. Maybe your dad split, leaving behind a mess you somehow managed to struggle through. So here you are, for better or worse, wondering how you made it this far.

Let's fast forward to the day you asked Jesus to live inside you. Key to this discovery was you wanted to experience His love on a personal level. Everything that happened in your life up to that point factors into how the journey shapes up from there.

A story Jesus told about a farmer illustrates what happens next. Details in Luke 8:4-15 explain a farmer sowing seeds on four types of soil. The soil has different features... some is loaded with rocks, thorns tangle other parts, one area is hard packed, while some is rich, fertile earth. The seed is sown in the whole field. Sure enough, doing what seed does, it starts to grow. But it reacts in different ways.

Seed landing on the hard-packed earth is eaten by crows. The seed which fell in the thorny places quickly sprouts but is choked out by vines and brambles. Seed that lands in the rocky part, springs up but the roots don't go very deep and the plants wilt away. The good, fertile earth allows the seed to grow in a normal way. It yields a big crop of grain.

Jesus makes a point using seed to represent God's Word. The story shows various outcomes based on the soil. It's all just dirt, right? Not exactly.

It's meant to show diverse personality types.

This part may get a little messy. So, turn away if you get queasy. You're going to be looking in a mirror, and mirrors don't lie. The rocky, thorny, packed-down earth stands for the dysfunctional, selfish side of people's character. Are you defensive, angry, sensitive and hurt when you don't get your way? Some people feel they're never wrong. Know anyone like that? Many others are driven by greed, status and pleasure. On the spiritual side, hateful demons will take any opportunity to hassle people.

All these conditions overlap and alter people's behavior depending on emotional baggage and internal conflict they deal with at a heart and soul level. It's common... folks defend their space, guard the insecurities, keep their masks tied in place; anything to keep from appearing weak.

Being vulnerable will bring heartache, or allow others to take advantage. These are mechanisms many use trying to navigate through life.

It may seem counterintuitive, but growing as a Christian uses a reverse method, a replacement process which acts out of the opposite spirit of those who live self-centered lives. To offset anger, learn to be patient. To neutralize stress, develop trust in God. Maybe you feel like cheating to get ahead. A shortcut is quicker than studying or working hard... so you think.

But living with guilt isn't so easy either. Remember, the mirror doesn't lie. Things will go wrong. When they do, you can no longer pretend to be smart when the dumb thing you did is printed on some billboard for everyone to see.

Galatians 5:19-21 lists common faults active in human life.

Each one is a means of using others or hurting ourselves, driven by appetites and ego. Lustful, lying, lazy habits push and shove to get in the driver's seat, trying to control the panic creeping into daily life.

On the flip side, verses 22 and 23 describe fruit produced by the Holy Spirit. Starting with love, joy, peace, it includes virtues and behaviors people use to succeed in life. They are qualities that transform human character. They enhance the present of Jesus inside, and free us from the things holding us in chains.

How does one adjust to this new approach to life? It's not a method. It's a choice to allow the presence of and teachings of Jesus to guide every decision and attitude. Some call it a Christian Worldview. "Living by faith," or "Walking in the Spirit," are Bible phrases which describe the "lifestyle."

Guard the nearness of God in your heart. Remember the peace you felt when you first inviting Jesus into your life? It's always there. If it seems to fade, look for the cause. Maybe you unloaded on someone? Went nuclear. So, go make it right. Say "I'm sorry." Keep adjusting. Keep learning. Be willing to change. Let the glow warm your heart again.

Challenges help us grow. The difficulties we overcome allows a deeper level of God's love to fill us. He plants living seed. It's all good. The soil? Not so much. It's on us to prep the earth, to nix the rocky, thorny, hard packed ground so the crop can grow. The bigger the better. The question is "Can you dig it?" Answer yes and you'll discover "It is so worth it."

Dial that compass due North and sail on sailor.