

SPIRITUAL

Growth



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LESSON 5

personal
spiritual growth

BIBLE STUDY

**Desire the sincere milk of the word
That you may grow thereby (1 Pet. 2:2)**

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In our study on “**Personal Spiritual Growth**,” it has been inspiring and rewarding to realize the boundless possibilities which are in store for those who develop spiritually

- With God there is an endless well of wisdom and possibilities.

As we advance in “self-development,” “dream-development,” and “personal development,” it not only helps our lives, but is also useful to the advancement of others

Although it appears that the triad is so complex, the truth is there is simplicity within the three parts as they are brought together as a unit of Development

- As with many things in life, simplicity even emerges from the complexity.
- Whenever we strategically unpack the clutter, the chaos of complexity dissipates

Integration of the three possibilities into coherent lines of development, assures that our lives will take on new meaning

Particularly, as we take steps to let go of the things that no longer serve us (externally and internally) and embrace more expansive possibilities

- Then and only then will our creative spirit emerge, and life becomes a joyous work

Most people live with negative effects of stress, hurry, worry, confusion, anxiety, and fear that sabotage their natural experience of well-being.

The change we all seek is that assurance in the prophetic utterance of **Isa. 26:3-4** “You will keep *him* in perfect peace, *Whose* mind is stayed *on You*, Because he trusts in You. ⁴ Trust in the LORD forever, For in YAH, the LORD, *is* everlasting strength.

Isaiah 26 is a hymn of trust in God's protection of his people depicting three phases.

1) Description of Zion (26:1–6). Isaiah compared Zion to a fortress. She was protected not by walls of stone, but by walls of salvation (Zech 2:5).

- Her gates were open to a faithful and righteous nation.
- Her citizens enjoyed a special measure of peace because
 - (a) they were marked by steadfast purpose; and
 - (b) they trusted in God (26:1–3).
- In view of these facts, Isaiah urged his readers to trust in God forever.
- He offered two proofs that the Lord was worthy of their trust.
 - First, God is eternal, the “everlasting Rock.”
 - Second, God had brought low the lofty and powerful city of evil doers.

○ The poor and lowly (people of God) would walk across the rubble of that once proud place

2) **Reflection by Zion (26:7–15)**. Isaiah entered into reflective prayer as he contemplated the benefits of God's judgments.

➤ 1st, he noted that the way the righteous travel through life becomes level as a result of the just judgments of the Lord

➤ 2nd, during their earthly pilgrimage the righteous wait for God to perform his judgments.

➤ 3rd, the saints are sustained in their patience by recalling God's memorial name.

□ The name Yahweh—He who Is, The Eternal—was associated with victory over oppressors ever since the days of the Exodus (26:7)

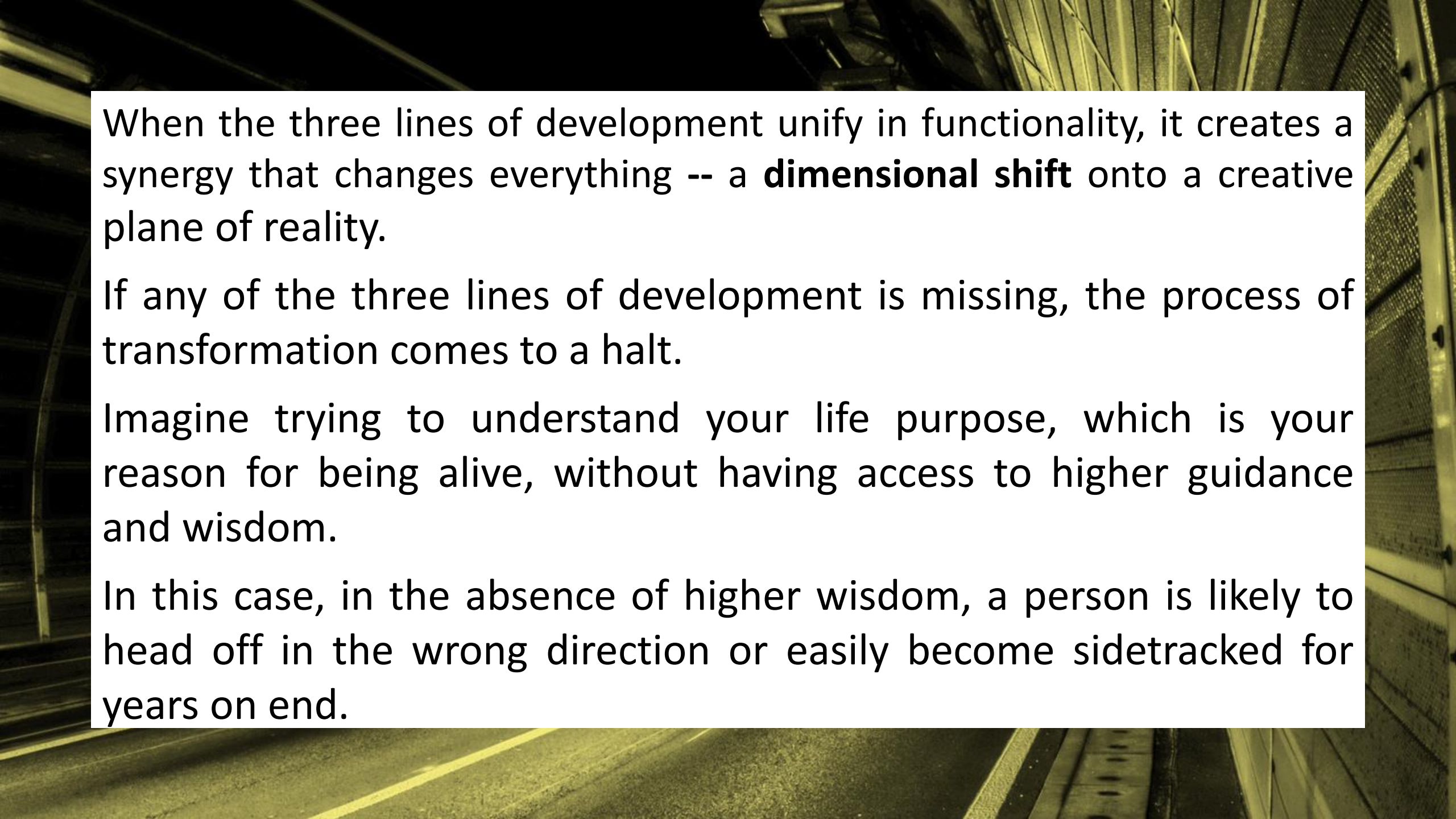
3) Expectation of Zion (26:16–19). God had been the hope of Israel in past distress.

➤ At times the nation had been so beaten down by divine chastisement that all the faithful could do was to whisper a prayer of desperation to the Lord

As we are seeking the life-changing alterations to our desires, Jesus can create “perfect peace” within the mind, though storms of trial rage without

We will find the change we were seeking in the love, power and wisdom that lighten up our hearts to the joy of serving the Master.

The three lines of development have the **goal of transforming painful experiences** of life into **love, joy, ease, oneness**, and flow and a new sense of wholeness.



When the three lines of development unify in functionality, it creates a synergy that changes everything -- a **dimensional shift** onto a creative plane of reality.

If any of the three lines of development is missing, the process of transformation comes to a halt.

Imagine trying to understand your life purpose, which is your reason for being alive, without having access to higher guidance and wisdom.

In this case, in the absence of higher wisdom, a person is likely to head off in the wrong direction or easily become sidetracked for years on end.

Also imagine a person who wants to have a better life, but is unable to dream because they don't love, nor value themselves.

Misguided feelings of being flawed, inadequate, and unworthy prevents many people from recognizing how special they are – particularly overshadowing their relationship with God

By contrast, knowing the source of developmental empowerment, we become trained through the special overcoming strength infused from the explosive power of Christ (Phil 4:13)

- When we trust in what God can do with us, that is the heart

One of the secrets to understanding How Divinity brings the three lines of transformation together is found in God's deep devotion to our progress and advancement.

If we can fully understand just how much God loves us, it will cast out all fear. “There is no fear in love; but **perfect love casts out fear**” (1 John 4:18a).

And God’s love is not a natural love, like we know here on earth. God’s love is powerful; carrying incredible life-changing power

- God’s love for us is supernatural—it goes beyond our natural understanding and reasoning.
- It carries great power to heal, set free, cleanse and bring peace.
- And when you put your trust in Christ, that same power that raised Jesus from the dead now lives inside of us (Eph. 1:19, 20); empowering us to live victorious lives.

Most, if not all of us, are familiar with Ephesians 3:20, “God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all we can ask or think.”

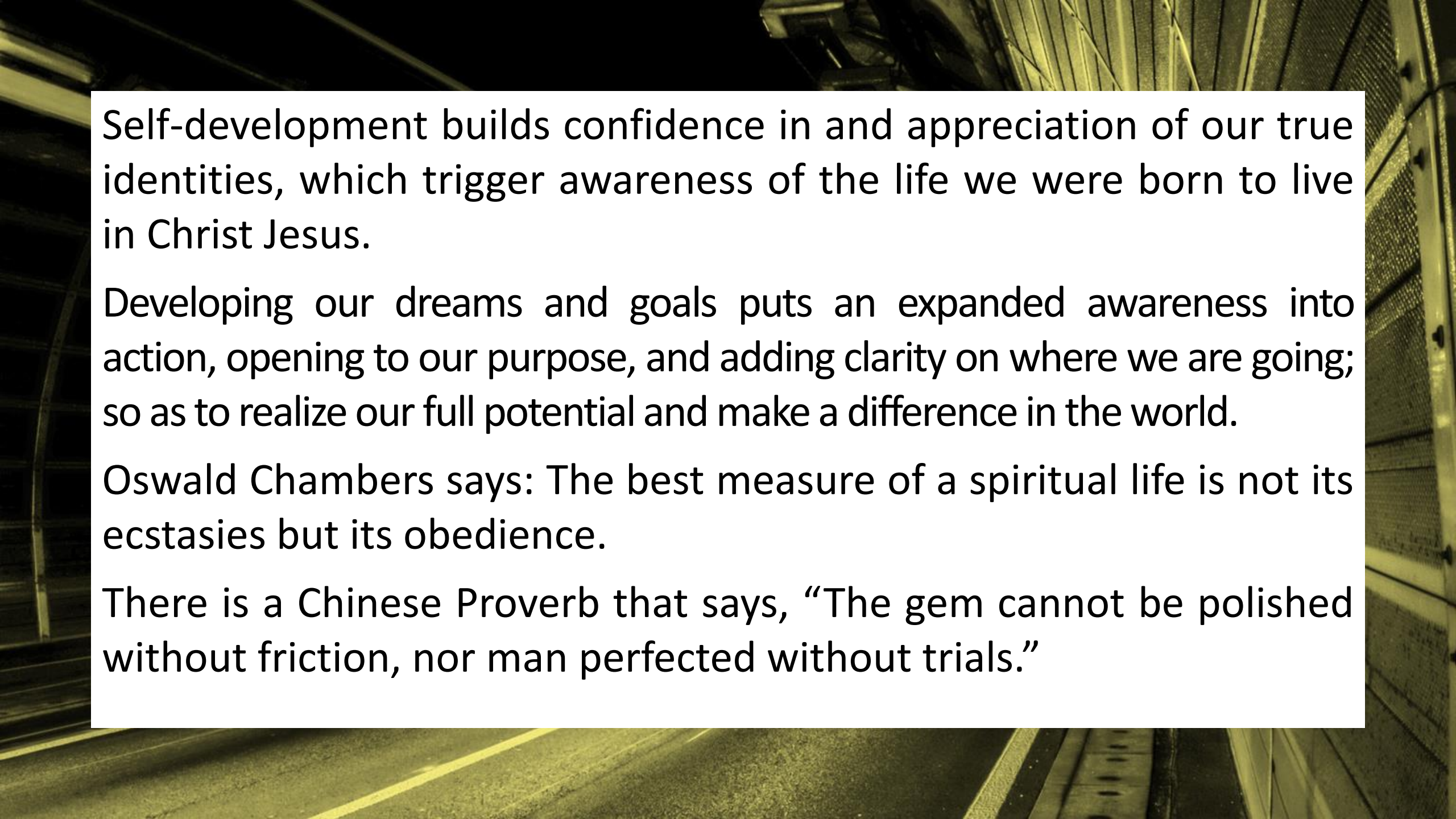
And as awesome and inspiring as the verse is, we run with it before reading the critical preamble to its application and understanding:

- **Eph. 3:16-19** that He would grant you, according to the **riches (ploutos – wealth) of His glory**, to be **strengthened (krataioō-- empowered) with might (dynamis) through His Spirit in the inner man**,¹⁷ that **Christ may dwell in your hearts** through faith; that you, being **rooted and grounded in love**,¹⁸ may be **able (exischoō—to be entirely competent)** to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height--¹⁹ **to know (ginōskō) the love of Christ** which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

➤ Carnal and worldly people are full of what they can do; the Christian is fully aware of what they cannot do without God's power in their inward parts

- The measure of the power is according to the perfection and excellence of the One giving the power
- Man measures by his imperfection and poverty of knowledge and his ideas will always be on the basis of need
- God, who forgives "according to the riches of His grace," makes known upon the forgiven the "riches of His glory."
- The nature of God's supply will ultimately culminate in the indwelling of Christ
 - (1) Christ, the essence of love, dwelling in us, and so filling our hearts with true love.
 - (2) We then have faith working by love producing positive effects; for we are then able to comprehend or grasp the potential of our future (Phil 3:12,13)

- a. **Breadth** of promise and blessing. c. **Depth** -- going down to the lowest.
- b. **Length** -- reaching to the end. d. **Height** -- raising up to the heavenlies
- There extremities help us to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.
 - It is fully known only by those taught by the Spirit and by those in whom He dwells
 - We further learn that God gives Himself to us all, according to the measure of how wide, deep, long and high we allow His Spirit to work in us
 - Therefore, the word “according to” in V 20 indicates the limitation “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, **according to the power that works in us.**”
 - God’s power—that can do exceedingly, abundantly above all we can ask our think—is limited to what we believe (Eph. 1:19 – “and what *is* the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power).



Self-development builds confidence in and appreciation of our true identities, which trigger awareness of the life we were born to live in Christ Jesus.

Developing our dreams and goals puts an expanded awareness into action, opening to our purpose, and adding clarity on where we are going; so as to realize our full potential and make a difference in the world.

Oswald Chambers says: The best measure of a spiritual life is not its ecstasies but its obedience.

There is a Chinese Proverb that says, “The gem cannot be polished without friction, nor man perfected without trials.”

In **Phil 4:16**, Paul stated: “For I am sure of this very thing, that the one who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.”

- Paul assures us as Christians that what God started in us He will finish.
- It will not be perfected or matured until the Lord Jesus returns.
- But how does a disciple of Jesus grow in his or her Christian life? What does it take to mature in the faith?
- What is God doing in the process? What is our role and what does a well-balanced Christian life look like?
- How can I make the decisions that God wants me to make?
- We all stand in need of someone to encourage us along the path of spiritual maturity

There are seven aspects of personal spiritual growth that need to be understood as we go through the process of growing in an intimate relationship with God and others; and They are:

- 1) the cost of discipleship
- 2) the larger picture of what God is doing and being Spirit filled
- 3) the role of trials and rewards in spiritual growth
- 4) basic Christian disciplines in our relationships with God and people
- 5) the importance of good works in growth
- 6) biblical decision making
- 7) having an eternal perspective.

The Cost of Discipleship

A disciple of Jesus is one who *learns and lives* from the teachings of Jesus Himself and those whom Jesus directly taught (the apostles).

The **Navigators**, a discipleship ministry, gives this definition: “A disciple continues in the Word, loves others, bears fruit, and puts Christ first.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) was a German pastor who ministered in Germany during the difficult days of Adolf Hitler.

- In his work the *Cost of Discipleship* he writes, “Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ. It remains an abstract idea, a myth The disciple places himself at the Master’s disposal, but at the same time retains the right to dictate his own terms. But then discipleship is no longer discipleship, but a program of our own to be arranged to suit ourselves.”
- The call to spiritual growth is the call to be a disciple of Jesus – calling us to be more like Him.
- It’s a call to submit ourselves to the lordship of Jesus.

- Jesus summarized the cost of discipleship with a vivid metaphor: “Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone wants to become my follower, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me” (Matt 16:24).
- This leads us to the importance of understanding what God has done and is doing in our life.

What is God doing with a disciple’s life? When considering this, one must understand God’s purpose or goal, that He is moving all Christians towards Christlikeness.

- Paul explains God’s plan: “those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son”(Rom 8:29).

God is chipping away at the stuff in a Christian’s life that is not like Christ to bring forth an image that is. He is molding us into a perfect piece of pottery.

- He is promising every believer in Jesus Christ that He will get him or her to this goal.
- The theological term for this is sanctification.
- Sometimes when God chips away and molds His grooves we feel the impact of it.
- God is using at least three means to propel believers in this direction: (1) the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, (2) trials, and (3) rewards.

One way that God is conforming believers into the image of Christ is through the work and empowerment or filling of the Holy Spirit.

When we became saved, we received the “baptism” of the Holy Spirit at which time we were indwelt by the Spirit of God (I Cor 12:13). This occurs one time.

- The indwelling Spirit gives us the inner spiritual resources to overcome sin.
- He gives us the desires and abilities to resist temptation and overcome it.
- As we submit to God's commands following the leading of the Holy Spirit, we are "filled" with the Spirit (Eph 5:18).
- This is a continuous process in which we allow the Spirit to direct and control our actions.
- On the other hand, when we sin we stifle the blessing of the Spirit's activity in our lives.
- Paul states, "Do not **quench** the Spirit" (I Thess 5:19; NASB) and again, "Do not **grieve** the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption

God also uses **trials** to produce spiritual growth in our lives as James reveals: “My brothers and sisters, consider it nothing but joy when you fall into all sorts of trials, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect effect, so that you will be perfect and complete, not deficient in anything” (James 1:2-4).

- How can one possibly be joyful in difficulties? It’s because God is testing our faith and using the trial to bring us to maturity.
- We can rejoice not at the painful experience of the trial but at the opportunity for growth.
- It has been said that trials can either make us **better** or **bitter**.

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