

**Abide Above**  
***A Guide to Spiritual Growth***  
By Miles J. Stanford

**Preface**

*Abide Above* is the fifth and final book in *The Green Letters* growth series.

It is to be remembered that graduation is but the commencement. Spiritual growth really begins at the top, from our position, our source in the Lord Jesus Christ on high. Hence this guide to growth sets forth the highest—the proper perspective from which to “keep looking down.”

To aid you in maintaining the highest, *Abide Above* points out the secondary, and the dangerous low-lying areas. The secret of healthy spiritual growth is to concentrate upon God’s very best as it is in Christ Jesus, thereby leaving no hunger for nor hankering after anything less than that best. Essentials only!

“Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect (full grown) in *every* good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen” (Heb. 13:20, 21).

Miles J Stanford  
Colorado Springs,  
Colorado

**Chapter 1—“The Way Up Is Down”**

*The two basic truths to be learned in spiritual progress are:  
the bankruptcy of self;  
our riches in Christ.*

It is the utter faithfulness of the Father that so deeply impresses the awakened believer, the one who hungers to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). “I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever; with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations” (Ps. 89:1). Through all my failure, my Father is working for my victory.

And at first it seems quite the opposite of faithfulness when the sovereign Father sets the hungry one’s faith and feet upon the path of His purpose. That is because there is the negative side of death as well as the positive side of life in the working out of His purpose to conform us to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29). He has decreed that “all things [both negative and positive] work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

The negative comes first, when the Father begins to transmit that purpose to the life of the Christian in terms of spiritual growth. This is when He may not seem to be very faithful. Nevertheless, “faithful are the wounds of a friend,” because “a friend loveth at all times” (Prov. 27:6; 17:17).

**Failure Categorized**

With some, the downward trend begins early in the Christian life. After a time of faithfulness in Bible study and memorization, church activity, prayer and witnessing, there comes a decline. Guilt-fostered attempts are made to regain the ground lost, but without avail. Heartbreaking as it is, the badly shaken Christian is being prepared early to realize the power of the self-life.

For most, the awakening comes much later. A pastor, for instance, after years of training and the hard work of becoming established in the ministry, is confronted with failure in both life and service. All of his praying, preaching, visitation, and counseling have not brought into being a growing and spiritual congregation.

Another leader has been successful in developing a large Sunday school and congregation, including an impressive missionary budget, only to realize at last that all has been man-centered and not established upon the Lord Jesus Christ and wholly for His glory.

A faithful layman has given time, talent, and treasure to his church, serving in various capacities of responsibility for many years. Ultimately he becomes discouraged and even disillusioned due to his own lack of growth in Christ, and the dearth of spiritual development in the lives of those whom he serves.

A Christian wife and mother seeks to establish and maintain a Christ-centered home for her family, as well as faithfully to carry out her church duties and activities. Often husband and children fail to respond to the Savior, resulting in heartache and sometimes tragedy.

Teenaged believers revel in their church activities and the fellowship of other groups. Then, off to college. All too often the sophistication of the present-day campus and classroom, whether secular or Christian, overwhelm the immature. The result is spiritual failure and conformity to the camel crowd.

On the other hand, many Christian young people make spiritual progress during their schooling and respond to a missionary challenge, only to turn aside before the goal is realized. Still others go to the foreign field, but drop out after the first term abroad.

Lastly, there is the missionary who has labored faithfully on the field term after term, who finally comes to the place of hunger for a deeper work in his life, as well as in the lives of those being served.

## **Failure Recognized**

Need, spiritual need! This is the prerequisite for growth in Christ. All of these circumstances of failure have been controlled by our ever-faithful Father, the God of circumstances. He knows what needs we need to keep US needy! It is true that the downward path (the negative side) has been the consequence both of the workings of self and the tactics of the enemy. Nevertheless, it is also true that the Father has seen to it that it happened, in order that the hunger caused through failure might be satisfied in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Countless Christians today are in the midst of utter failure—that they know. What they do not as yet know is that at the same time they are in the midst of the Father’s purpose for them. During the initial downward process they have been blinded to the work of His faithful hands, in order that they might come to realize something of the extent of their weakness and the overpowering strength of the self-life. Down! and yet—“nor depth ... shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord” (Rom. 8:39).

Ever paradoxically, our Father uses our negatives to bring forth His positives. Our sin meant death for His Son, that we might have life (John 3:16). He was made to be our sin on the Cross, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5:21). “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid!” (Rom. 6:1, 2). God’s “all things” working together for our good are in His hands, not ours! He is our Sovereign, we are His subjects. We cannot escape from His eternal love—“the Lord corrects and disciplines every one whom He loves” (Heb. 12:6, Amp.).

Many children of God today have all but given up. Self and the world have been steadily taking over in their once bright Christian lives and service. Most have simply quit trying to live the Christian life; many have become sick and tired of church for various reasons, and no longer attend regularly if at all. Others are no longer attempting to maintain a Christian home; while there are those who have dropped out of Bible school or seminary, the pastorate, the mission field. Many Christian couples once had a hunger and vision for full-time service, but nothing came of it; hence, seeming failure and guilt have hung over their lives as a dark pall.

There are other couples who have entered into their life service and labored diligently for years, but there has not been solid spiritual growth or lasting fruit. They seek to carry on, trying one thing after another, but never seem to quite find *His* answer to the hunger and need of their hearts and lives. It seems to them that the only alternative is to quit as gracefully as possible and get into something that they can handle.

### **Failure Utilized**

These are some of the very conditions that the Father uses to prepare us to see and enter into that which He has already given in the Lord Jesus. There must be this drastic revelation of self, by the most effective means suited to the individual—all in the realm of personal failure.

The agonizing downward process brings us from simply believing on Him at Calvary, to living in Him in heaven—from substitution, to personal identification. As lost sinners we were prepared by the Spirit to see and accept the Lord Jesus as our Substitute; as defeated believers we have to be prepared by the Spirit to see and abide in the Lord Jesus as our Life. There is no alternative, and He has been faithfully and quietly carrying it out all through the fruitless and failure-ridden years. “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you” (1 Peter 4:12).

When the Father has us prepared by means of Romans Seven, He opens the liberating truths of Romans Eight—but not until! It is first, “Oh, wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” and then, “I thank God through Jesus Christ, our Lord” (Rom. 7:24, 25). Then, “Come, and let us return unto the Lord; for he hath torn, and he will heal us; for he hath smitten, and he will bind us up” (Hosea 6:1). “Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it” (I Thess. 5:24).