

Growing In Christ II Peter 3:18; Colossians 1:9-14

In his book, The Lost Art of Disciple Making, Leroy Eims shares this thought-provoking illustration to set the stage for today's message. One spring our family was driving from Fort Lauderdale to Tampa, Florida. As far as the eye could see, orange trees were loaded with fruit. When we stopped for breakfast, I ordered orange juice with eggs. 'I'm sorry,' the waitress said. 'I can't bring you orange juice. Our machine is broken.' At first, I was dumbfounded. We were surrounded by millions of oranges, and I knew they had oranges in the kitchen- orange slices garnished our plates. What was the problem? No juice? Hardly. We were surrounded by thousands of gallons of juice. The problem was they had become dependent on a machine to get it. Christians are like that. They may be surrounded by Bibles in their homes, but if something should happen to the Sunday morning preaching service, they would have no nourishment for their souls. The problem is not a lack of spiritual food – but that many Christians haven't grown enough to know how to get it for themselves.

Last week I said that the results of the recent congregational survey indicated that there was a need to provide some clarity about our mission as a church. Let me refresh our memory. First, our purpose: ***Fellowship Bible Church is organized specifically for the God-honoring purpose of the edification of believers from God's Holy Word, the Bible, the evangelism of non-believers through the Gospel of God's saving grace, and the fellowship of its members through worship, preaching/teaching, and Christ-centered activities.***

This gives the reason why we exist. We're not a social club, although we do social events.

We're not a ball team, although we have some entertaining activities.

We're not an activist group, although we support groups that fit with our core beliefs and values.

We're not a book club, although we study and discuss a book, which just happens to be the all time best-selling book ever, that being the Bible.

We're not a travel agency, although we discuss plans for a trip to an eternal destination.

We are a church that exists for the purpose of maturing believers and evangelizing non-believers and we do so through a thorough study of the Bible.

To accomplish this, we have a mission statement, which everyone should know by now is located on the front of your bulletin. Our mission is: ***Gathering with Christ, Growing in Christ, Going for Christ, Giving to Christ.***

As I have thought more about our mission statement this past week, I might consider adding one more point as to why we do what we do. It is the umbrella under which and the reason for why we do what we do. It should be the driving force behind everything we do as a church. I would suggest to you that our ultimate purpose is ***for the glory of Christ.***

I Corinthians 10:31 says we are to do everything for the glory of God. Everything we do as a church should be to that end.

As we gather with Christ, it should be to glorify Him.

As we grow in Christ, it should be to glorify Him.

As we go for Christ, it should be to glorify Him.

As we give to Christ, it should be to glorify Him.

Our focus last week was on the first statement of our mission as we addressed the importance of our gathering with Christ. As believers in Christ we all are an important part of the body of Christ. We all have a role that is directed to each other in this body. There should be no lone Ranger Christian.

I Corinthians 12:27 says we are the body of Christ, and ***“each one of you is a part of it.”***

Today we address the second purpose of our church: ***growing in Christ.*** To begin with, we need to look at the manifestation of growing in Christ.

I. THE MANIFESTATION OF GROWING IN CHRIST

What comes to mind when you think about what it means to grow in Christ?

Personal or group Bible study?

Personal or group Prayer?

Listening to someone preach?

Reading books about spiritual growth?

Going to seminars or conferences?

I would suggest to you that while those are good, and important ways for growth, they are merely the means to the end of what it is to grow in Christ.

If we were to boil it all down, the reason we do those things is for one purpose – to become more like Christ. To grow in Christ means then, that we are becoming like Him in character, to become more holy each day in our desire to be godly.

I Thessalonians 4:3 tells us that our sanctification is God's will for us.

I Peter 1:15-16 exhorts us to be holy because God is holy.

I John 3:2-3 says that because we are the children of God, we are to purify ourselves as He is pure.

Spiritual growth does not happen automatically when we trust Christ as Savior. Yes, there are some changes in character that take place right away, but there are other things about our character that take time to mature the more we understand God's Word.

How many of you experienced instant patience the moment you were saved?

How many of you had instant joy or lasting peace the moment you were saved?

How many of you developed automatic love for others, even those who use you or harbor ill will toward you?

If I was a betting man, I'd say that none of us was instantaneously and permanently changed into the character of Christ. We all experience the ebb and flow of spiritual growth. One day we think we have some area of our spiritual life conquered and the next day we fail miserably. That's part of the process of growing in Christ. As the saying goes, we take two steps forward and one step back. And while that may discourage us, we need to recognize that we are making progress. As you have heard me say "I'm not what I was and neither am I yet what

I'm going to be. When we look at examples in the Bible, we're in good or should I say, growing company.

Peter comes to mind. He was often outspoken and impetuous and yet I think those failures helped him grow in Christ so that he could write that we are to be self-controlled (**I Peter 1:13**) and to be holy as God is holy (**I Peter 1:15-16**).

Then there is Paul to whom we owe a debt of gratitude for all the letters we have that helped to shape his and our efforts at spiritual growth. He stated in **Philippians 3:14** something that should be the goal of each of us: "**I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.**" Yet he also is the one who said in **Romans 7:15 -24** that there were things he knew he should do but didn't, and things he knew he shouldn't do, but did anyway, calling himself a wretched man.

If we took a journey into the Old Testament, we would see the same thing, that those who were considered righteous and a someone after God's own heart also had their moments of failure. Abraham had a steady progression of faith in God even though at times he went ahead of God.

Moses spoke with God face to face, but he also questioned God and on one occasion, became angry.

David had his short comings, yet he said he delighted in doing God's will, found God as His rock, and hid God's Word in heart so he wouldn't sin against God.

These examples aren't excuses for us not to grow, but rather examples that demonstrate in spite of times of failure, spiritual growth is possible if we choose to move forward rather than wondering why try when we seem to fail more than follow God.

The point I'm trying to make is that spiritual growth is a slow and steady process as we allow the indwelling Holy Spirit to make the necessary course corrections to bring us into the likeness of Christ in our character.

II Timothy 3:16-17 (All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable...)

In essence, Paul says the goal of the believer is to become complete in Christ and we do that through the Holy Spirit and through the Holy Spirit inspired Word of God. He says that the Bible is beneficial for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. In other words, when we have gotten off the path in our spiritual growth, God's Word and His Spirit provide us with the course correction we need to get back on track.

Jerry Bridges asks some questions for us to consider if we are serious about growing in Christ.

“What is your spiritual goal? Do you really want to get the prize? Do you want to grow to be the man or woman God wants you to be? Do you want to pay the price of the spiritual disciplines you need to practice in order to grow? Or will you be content to sort of muddle through your Christian life and, at the end, have to sum it all up as no more meaningful than a trip to the corner store for a loaf of bread? The choice is yours. What will it be?”

Growing in Christ, which we are commanded to pursue, is not a haphazard or casual trek through this thing we call life. It is an intentional, focused, consistent and sometimes difficult pursuit. As I said last week regarding our gathering with Christ, the same can be said about growing in Christ: it is not done out of convenience but born in conviction and lived out in commitment. Growing in Christ is something we are to devote ourselves to, which takes both discipline and determination. Referring again to **Philippians 3:14**, Paul likens our growth in Christ to the effort of an athlete who disciplines himself to compete at the top level and they do it only to receive a temporary prize while our effort produces fruit that will last forever.

Pro basketball players who have reached the pinnacle of their sport continue to practice 4-8 hours a day. They never think that because they have reached that level they no longer need to work hard anymore. They continue to strive to improve. That's the effort Paul says we should give in striving for the prize of Christ like character.

We manifest growth in Christ or what we can also refer to as spiritual maturity, when we become more

like Christ in our character through application of His Word empowered by the Holy Spirit to make those necessary changes. It requires a change in our priorities, a change in pleasing ourselves to one of pleasing God in what we do and think by learning to obey Him. The manifestation of growing in Christ requires consistency and perseverance. It's only possible when we take the advice of Paul in **Galatians 5:16** to walk or conduct ourselves by living by the Spirit. That means a step by step, one step at a time following Him, yielding to His guidance as we allow Him to take control of our character and conduct and make it like that of Christ. Growing in Christ is an act of submission to the Holy Spirit as we allow Him to develop the fruit of His character in our lives, like love, joy, patience, kindness, etc. (**Galatians 5:22-23**).

The manifestation of spiritual growth is evident when we begin to exhibit more of Christ's character. **In your life, is there evidence of growing in Christ to be like Christ?**

One of the purposes we gather as a congregation is to help each other continue to grow in Christ.

Next, let's consider the measure of growing in Christ.

II. THE MEASURE OF GROWING IN CHRIST

When we think of measuring something, we think of measuring its length or breadth or width; or measuring something in regard to volume like if you are following a recipe for making a cake or how many widgets were produced in a given hour; or it could be measuring progress in things like losing weight or lowering your blood pressure, or achieving a personal record in running a 5k.

When I started therapy after my shoulder surgery, they assessed my range of motion by taking some initial measurements with a protractor. Periodically they would remeasure to determine progress. At the end of therapy, they did additional measurements to show the doctor what progress had been made over the course of my weeks of therapy. Because I had met the standards of their measurements, they could

release me without additional therapy.

Growing in Christ is something that can be measured.

Do I devote myself to teaching, to the life of the church that includes fellowship outside of church services, and to prayer?

Do I have an increased passion for worship of God?

Do I have a growing desire for righteousness?

Do I have a growing desire to help others?

Is there a greater patience in waiting for God?

Do others notice a positive change in my character?

Those are things that can measure spiritual growth.

When a baby is born, you periodically take that infant to the pediatrician. He or she has a chart that shows where a child should be at different stages of development. They are things like height and weight. It helps the doctor determine if the child is making progress in healthy growth.

It's the same for the Christian. At the moment of the new birth, or salvation, the child of God begins the journey of maturing spiritually in Christ. The standard by which he or she is measured is found in the Bible in first, our love for God's Word.

A. Our Love For God's Word

Jeremiah 15:16 "Thy words were found and I did eat them, and they became the joy and rejoicing of my soul."

It's not just that I love God's Word more and want to spend more time reading it, enraptured by it, to fill my heart and mind with it, but that I also want to obey it. It's not just a passion for God's Word, it's participation in obeying it. We might say that we love to obey God's Word. When I genuinely love it and live, there should be a manifested joy that others will notice, and desire to love it and live it more each day.

I Peter 2:2-3 "As newborn babes, crave pure milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good."

Hebrews 5:11-14

In **I Corinthians 2:13-14** Paul says that the person without the Holy Spirit cannot understand the things of God written in His Word and then in **3:2** he tells them that he only gave them very basic spiritual truth because they weren't mature enough spiritually, they weren't yet ready to receive and understand deeper spiritual truth. The criticism was that many of them had been a Christian long enough to have matured to the point of understanding deeper truths evidenced in spiritual growth, but they were still spiritually immature.

Turn to **II Peter 3:18** where we can sum up this measurement of God's Word. Here is an admonition by Peter as to what it means to grow in Christ. In **verse 17**, Peter warns that the believer should be on guard against false teachers who want to lead us away from the truth. In order to be on guard, he tells us to "**grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.**"

Growing in grace means reading God's Word as we let it dwell in us richly (**Colossians 3:16**). Reading itself does not make us grow in Christ. But God uses the discipline of reading Scripture to help mature us. In **Psalms 139:23-24**, David invites God to search his heart. As we pray the same prayer, God's Spirit uses God's Word when we read it to reveal areas in our lives that don't measure up to His standard. If I fail to read road signs while driving, I can get into a lot of trouble. If I fail to read God's Word, I won't know how God wants me to live, the direction He wants me to take.

When we admit that we are failing in an area, spiritual growth begins to happen when we confess that sin and invite the Holy Spirit to conform us to the character of Christ in that area. So when we read Scripture we ought to invite the Holy Spirit teach us and change us. When we read a passage, we can ask three questions: what does it say, what does it mean, and what does it mean to me?

To grow in grace does not mean that we increase in God's grace or that today I get more grace than I had yesterday. We already have all of God's grace. Grace never increases. Because His grace is infinite, it can never be more and can never be less. When

Scripture says that God's grace is sufficient it means that it's in full measure and always available when we need it.

To grow in grace means that we grow in understanding of what Jesus did for us in dying for our sins with a desire then to live according to His character by conducting our lives in a way that will please Him. Growing in grace understands that we live by grace and are changed by grace.

II Timothy 2:1-4 – by grace we are strengthened in living a godly life each day.

II Corinthians 12:7-10 – by grace we endure suffering.

II Corinthians 8:1-15 – by grace we give cheerfully even when we may have little.

Colossians 3:16 – by grace we can sing joyfully when singing praise can be hard.

II Peter 3:18 – by grace we grow spiritually.

Warren Wiersbe states that **“To grow in grace means to become more like the Lord Jesus Christ, from whom we receive all the grace we need.”**

John 1:16 **“From the fullness of [Christ’s] grace we have all received one blessing after another.”**

To grow in grace is in a tense that means that we are to be continually growing to be like Christ, to keep working at it through the work and power of the Holy Spirit. And Peter tells us what some of those graces are in the opening chapter.

II Peter 1:5-7

Are we growing in the graces of Christ’s character each day?

Peter then adds that we should be growing in the knowledge of Christ. Again, this is something that we are to keep doing.

What steps am I taking to know Christ better in my knowledge of Him? This isn't just about intellectual knowledge of Him through an academic study of God's Word and yes, we should be doing that so we can know where to turn in the Bible when various issues come up. We need to know what the Bible says. Growing in the knowledge of Christ also refers to the application of God's Word as we learn

more about what it says and means.

One of the preeminent themes of Peter's epistle is the knowledge of God as they faced false teachers who were teaching error verses true knowledge.

Paul advises: **“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.” (II Timothy 2:15)**

Acts 17:11 **“Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.”**

Peter says in **II Peter 1:4** that God's precious promises found in His Word, have been given to us to live a godly life and avoid the corruption of the world that comes from evil desires.

Psalms 1:2 tells us that we should delight daily in the Word of God and meditate on it. The psalmist continues in **119:9, 11** by saying that when we treasure God's Word in our heart it helps us not sin. The positive take on that passage is that God's Word helps us live out the character of Christ.

Why do we gather together as a body of believers?
We encourage one another to grow.

Warren Wiersbe reminds us that **“The church is God's nursery for the care and feeding of Christians, the God-ordained environment that encourages them to grow.”**

It is a matter of choice and priority to gather for that purpose. The old adage is appropriate here: **“you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink”** meaning that we can come to church, we can bring our Bible, we can even read it, but that doesn't mean we will take the steps necessary to drink from it. **Psalm 42:1-2** **“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for You, O God. My soul pants for God, for the living God. Where can I go to meet with God?”**

Turn now to **Colossians 1:9-14**.

We see here that knowledge is more than just knowing the character of Christ, that we should be living out. Knowledge is also in regard to the will of God, which includes both how to live godly as a Christian, as well as in decisions we must make every day. Paul tells us the reason why we should know the will of God – it's to **“live a life worthy of the Lord and please Him in every way”** by bearing fruit through good works and to be strengthened in our faith so that we can patiently endure the many trials we will face in our journey of spiritual growth.

The key to growing in Christ is to know and live God's Word by allowing it to control our thoughts and actions. John MacArthur notes that **“what controls our thoughts, controls our behavior. Wisdom and understanding of God's Word leads to obeying His Word and His will.”** Christ like character and conduct are by-products of wisdom and understanding.

Knowledge of God's Word is crucial for our spiritual growth.

Knowledge of God's Word is evident in our obedience. (**I John 2:3-6**)

Knowledge of God's Word increases our love for others. (**Philippians 1:9-11**)

In his book Pursuit of Holiness, Jerry Bridges sums up what it means to grow in Christ. **“The Holy Spirit wrote Scripture, we learn Scripture, the Spirit reminds us of what we learned, we apply what He reminds us of.”**

The standard by which he or she is measured is found in the Bible in first, our love for God's Word. It's also measured in our living out God's Word.

B. Our Living Out God's Word

Paul provides us with some guidelines by which we can measure whether we are growing in Christ. One such standard is found in **Galatians 5**. In **verses 19-21** he lists some acts or characteristics of the flesh that we may have done before coming to Christ as Savior. These may not be totally eradicated in our life once we are saved, but they shouldn't characterize the behavior of a person who says they

are a Christ follower.

He then describes in **verses 22-23** godly character that should be evident in the believer who yields to the work of the Holy Spirit, as we saw earlier in **Galatians 5:22-23** describing the character fruit He develops in us. **When we consider just those nine Christ like characteristics, are we more like Christ in those areas than we were last month, or last year, or 10 years ago?** Those Christ qualities can be measured and if we are growing in Christ, there should be increasing evidence of them in our lives.

Earlier this year we spent a number of weeks looking at some of the character traits of Christ and discussed how we should emulate them.

They included things like the love of Jesus, His mercy, His grace, His joy, His peace, His patience, His forgiveness, His gentleness, His faithfulness, His obedience, and His humility. Each of them is a characteristic that can be measured in how we are living them out.

Growing in Christ is measurable.

Do we love God's Word?

Do we live out God's Word?

What then are the means of growing in Christ?

III. THE MEANS OF GROWING IN CHRIST

We have already talked about our need to be in God's Word and doing so regularly and about our reliance on the Holy Spirit not only to teach us, but to use God's Word to convict us and change us. We have also noted the importance of gathering with others regularly to learn and grow in Christ.

Proverbs 27:17 “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.”

The Navigators came up with a great illustration to help us see how we can grow in Christ. The hand.

Hear the Word – **Jeremiah 3:15**

Read the Word – **Deuteronomy 17:19**

Study the Word – **Proverbs 2:1-5; II Timothy 2:15**

Memorize the Word – **Psalms 119:9, 11**

Meditate on the Word – **Psalms 1:2-3**

As a church, we try to provide a variety of ways to grow in Christ through a study of God's Word.

Sunday Adult Impact
 Sunday weekly messages
 Wednesday Pathway to Power
 Men's Bible study
 Bible study fellowship

We encourage your own daily devotions. There's
 Our Daily Bread, and many online devotionals.

StudyLight.org

The Navigators

Insight for Living – Chuck Swindoll

In Touch – Charles Stanley

Truth for Life – Alistair Begg

Turning Point – David Jeremiah

And there are so many more. Take advantage of
 those to help you grow in Christ.

The Navigators have many excellent Bible study
 materials for new and growing believers. Their
Design for Discipleship series of 7 books leads a
 maturing Christian through a progression in what it
 means to grow in Christ.

Name a topic and there are any number of
 wonderful Bible study options to choose from.

My point is that with so many available means of
 growing in Christ it really boils down to a personal
 desire of making spiritual growth a priority. There is
 no lack of means to do so.

Let me close with one final thought. **Why should we
 desire to grow in Christ? What's the purpose
 beyond our good in becoming more like Christ?** I
 think the answer is found back in **II Peter 3:18**. It's
 in this verse that we see the motivation for growing
 in Christ and really the totality of why we exist as a
 church.

IV. THE MOTIVATION FOR GROWING IN CHRIST – II Peter 3:18

Why should we want to grow in Christ? It's all for
 God's glory. We glorify God when we live a life in
 character and conduct that is Christ like. He
 receives praise through a life that is godly. Our
 maturing in Christ is a doxology of worship to Him
 both now and for eternity. He who made our growth
 possible through His Word and by His Spirit is
 worthy of receiving glory. Let's make every effort

to gather with Christ and to Grow in Christ, for the
 glory of God.

**What steps do you need to take today to commit
 yourself to growing in Christ?**

As a follower of Christ, we should never be
 satisfied with where we are in His likeness. We
 should never be content with where we are
 spiritually, because there is always room for
 improvement in spiritual growth. Let's help each
 other grow in Christ as we gather with Christ.

Paul writes in **Galatians 4:19** **"I am again in the
 pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in
 you."**

Let the words of this hymn be our daily prayer:
 O to be like Thee! blessed Redeemer,
 This is my constant longing and prayer.
 Gladly I'll forfeit all of earth's treasures,
 Jesus, Thy perfect likeness to wear.

And may this be our hearts desire:
**Psalm 15:17 "And I – in righteousness I will see
 Your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with
 seeing Your likeness."**