

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 10/1/06 PM
2 Peter 3:18 "Get Ready to Grow"

In two weeks Growth Groups will begin at WBC, eight weeks of meeting in small groups during the evening service. I'd like to prepare for the Growth Groups by talking this evening about the subject of *growing*. Our text is...

2 Peter 3:18

"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen."

Let's talk about four aspects of growing either addressed or implied in this verse:

1. The Potential for Growing
2. The Prospect of Growing
3. The Process of Growing
4. The Prerequisites for Growing

I. The Potential for Growing

"But grow *in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*" Not everyone has the ability to grow to be what pleases God. The potential for growth is not inherent. It's not natural.

Every since Adam's sin in Genesis 3, what's natural is sin. What's natural is doing things our own way rather than God's way and the consequence of that is in the end *death*. In a Genesis 3 world, things deteriorate and break down. Instead of growing, things die.

"But Peter's counsel here seems to indicate that growth can occur. He wouldn't tell us to grow if we couldn't grow, would he?" Good point! The fact is, growth can occur. The potential for growth is available. That potential is linked to the person of Jesus Christ, and more specifically, as our verse indicates, it's linked to the *grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*.

This is critical. Only those who know Christ can grow in ways that please God. To please God you must know Christ as your Savior and Lord. But if you do know Christ, you have the potential to grow! You can grow!

"Why is it then," you ask, "that so many people who are sitting in churches don't seem to be growing? Why aren't they experiencing this potential?" Good question. For starters, just because a person is sitting in church doesn't mean they truly know Christ, and as we've just stated ONLY those who truly know Christ can grow.

But there are other reasons people may not be growing, even people who truly know Christ. [Invite congregation to discuss: What are some of those reasons?]

There may be hindrances in our lives (sins) that are choking out the growth. We may have influences in our lives that are like weeds that prevent good plants from developing. We may be lacking some elements that are essential for growth (we'll talk about that more in a moment).

But one huge reason many aren't growing as they ought is because they really haven't grasped the potential they have in Christ. That's what Peter talked about at the beginning of this letter...

Note 1:2—“Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.” We have grace (that’s God’s unmerited favor and help) and peace *in abundance*. There’s no shortage of God’s help available. How do we tap into it? Note the next phrase... “*through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.*” What you don’t know can hurt you! Many who are floundering along do so because they don’t know what they have. It’s through growing in our knowledge of God and His Son that we grow! But what specifically must we know about God that affects our growth? Peter addresses that in the very next verses...

2 Peter 1:3-4 –“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness.” Stop and chew on that statement. What has God given us? *Everything we need for life and godliness*. That means He has not shortchanged us one iota. We have what we need to live the kind of life that will please Him. When a person says, “Well, I just don’t have what it takes to live a good Christian life,” that’s not true, not if that person truly is in Christ. There are no second rate Christians in God’s family.

So how can I tell if I am truly in Christ? Look back at verse 1 where Peter identifies his audience, those who verse 3 says have all they need for godliness...

Verse 1—“Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours.” The readers to whom Peter is writing were people who had received God’s righteousness by faith in Christ. So if you have placed your faith in Christ, and if you have consequently been robed in Christ’s righteousness, that means you have Christ’s merit whereby God accepts you in His sight, and furthermore, you also have Christ’s merit which enables you to grow!

Note the next phrase in verse 3, “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness *through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.*” This is critical. It’s through our knowledge of the One who called us that we tap into this potential we have for life and godliness. And since God is infinite, we’ll always have room to grow in our knowledge of Him. But if we are not growing in His knowledge, we will not be growing in the experience of life and godliness.

What specifically must we learn if we are to grow in our knowledge of God? Notice the answer in verse 4, “Through these he has given us *his very great and precious promises*, so that *through them* you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.” It’s through God’s promises that we experience the potential Peter is describing. Where do we find God’s promises? In His Word, the Bible.

If you want to grow as a Christian you must be growing in your knowledge of God’s promises, and if you are going to grow in your knowledge of His promises you must be growing in your knowledge of His Word. That’s what Growth Groups are all about!

And what does Peter say is the result of learning God’s promises? He highlights two “growth areas” in the purpose clause in verse 4...

“So that *through them* [the promises] you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.” Here are the growth areas:

1. *You may participate in the divine nature.* That doesn’t mean we become God, but it does mean we become *like* God. We begin to share His moral likeness. He is love

and we become loving. He is holy and we become holy. He is righteousness and we reflect His righteousness. He is kind and we become kind.

2. *You may escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.* Before coming to know Christ we were slaves, slaves to our own self-seeking, self-destroying passions. But now we can escape that corruption. We can live differently than the world does and we used to live.

In other words, if you know God you have the potential to *put off* something and *put on* something. You will cease being what you were and become something different. You will change. You will grow!

What kind of promises has God given us in His Word that produce these two effects? Let me give you a sampling...

*A promise in 1 Corinthians 10:13: God will never give you more than you can bear but will always make a way for you to honor Him in a situation.

E.g.—share story about Steve Lee who lost his job this week...

*A promise in Hebrews 13:6: God will never leave us.

*A promise in James 1:5: God will always give us wisdom if we ask.

*A promise in 1 John 5:14-15: God will always hear our prayer.

*A promise in Philippians 4:19: God will always meet our needs.

Those promises of God (and countless others in the Scriptures) are the key to your growth and mind. The potential is there. But we won't grow...if we don't know His promises!

II. The Prospect of Growing

Just a brief word about the prospect of growing. In other words, what's the goal in growing? In a word, it's *maturity*. When a child is born, parents invest time, energy, money!, love, and a whole lot more into that child with the desire to see that child grow and *mature*. It thrills a parent's heart to see his or her child *maturing*.

What measuring stick does God use to determine our maturity level? Peter tells us in our text. 2 Peter 3:18 again—"But grow in the grace and knowledge *of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*." God measures maturity by His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus is the prototype, the measuring stick, the standard, the goal, the prospect.

The goal in growing is to become like Him. If you are already like Christ then you do not need Growth Groups! But if you have some areas that still do not reflect Christ, then you aren't done yet!

This certainly is God's agenda for His children (see Romans 8:28-29). He works together all things (including trials) for our good, and "the good" is that we might share the likeness of His Son, Jesus Christ.

III. The Process of Growing

"But *grow* in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Peter ends this letter with a command. Note the imperative, "Grow!" This isn't optional, but mandatory. And the command implies it will take work on our part. We are to do something intentional that will result in change, in *growth*.

The verb is present tense. That means this responsibility is continuous. It's something we must do over and over. A better word is *process*. Growth is a process. No one gets holy in a hurry. No child reaches adulthood in a day. The maturing process

takes *time*. Granted, it takes *more than* time (there are plenty of people who have been sitting in churches for years who have not matured), but it does require time.

Discuss: What happens if we fail to understand that growth is a process? It leads to frustration and discouragement. “Well, I prayed but nothing seems to be happening! Why do I still struggle as a Christian?!” Part of this person’s frustration is a failure to understand that growth involves a process.

I mentioned a moment ago that growth takes more than time. What else is needed? That brings us to the next aspect...

IV. The Prerequisites of Growing

Think of a baby. What does a baby need if it’s going to “grow up” and become a mature adult? Many things are needed but I’d like to focus on three essentials. The baby needs...

1. A good environment—where there’s love, security, nurture, etc
2. Food/nutrition—no food, no fuel for growth
3. Exercise—no exercise, no development of muscles, only obesity

What does it take for a baby Christian to grow up and become mature? Many things, but at the core he needs these same three essentials in the spiritual realm...

1. A good environment—that’s what the church is all about (a greenhouse!)
2. Food/nutrition—that’s what the Word is all about (1 Pet. 2:1-2)
3. Exercise—that’s what service is all about

This morning we took a survey of the congregation. We asked several questions pertaining to these three essentials.

We asked about church attendance. If we are not in the environment of the local church regularly, we will not grow as we ought. According to the survey, of those in church this morning, ___ % were in church at least three Sundays in the past month. That means ___ % missed church at least half of the Sundays.

Another question pertained to serving. ___% said they served in their local church in the past week. ___% did not.

One of the questions we asked pertained to Bible reading. According to the survey, ___ % of those attending our church read the Bible at least four days last week. That means ___% did not. That figure is particularly significant.

If I told you that ___% of this congregation ate food less than four days last week, would that be cause for alarm? We’d be pretty anemic, wouldn’t we?

My purpose isn’t to chastise. It’s to help. The deacons and I have prayerfully thought about this condition and are proposing something very practical to help.

GOAL: Here’s a simple goal I’d like to lay before you. For every member of WBC be...

- ...*In the Word and prayer every day*
- ...*Under the Word in church every week*
- ...*Serving the Word every moment*

We have a tool we are going to use in conjunction with Growth Groups to help us accomplish that first item, to get into God’s Word. Our goal is to see, by the end of

Growth Groups (December 3), the percentage of our people spending time in God's Word at least four times a week increase from ___ % to 75 %.

How are we going to get there? Here's how... The seven minute challenge. Seven minutes. That's not very long, not really. Seven weeks. That's not very long either. Yet seven purposeful minutes a day for seven weeks could change your life forever, for real!

If you participate in Growth Groups you will receive a booklet that is intended to help you as an individual, along with your brothers and sisters at Wheelersburg Baptist Church, develop the discipline of a daily "quiet time" with God. For the next two months while Growth Groups are occurring at WBC, we are encouraging the entire church family to study the book of Ephesians in their personal quiet times. In addition, we'll be sharing together highlights of what we are learning during the first ten minutes of Growth Groups each Sunday evening.

Here is what the daily, seven minute plan looks like...

1 minute: Pray & ask God to teach you from His Word

5 minutes: Read God's Word and answer two simple questions

1 minute: Pray & ask God to help you apply His Word

It's quite simple, yet the results can be eternally significant. If you will invest seven minutes a day (I would recommend in the morning before you begin your other daily responsibilities), you will get to know God and His Word better. Seven minutes a day for seven weeks will take you through Ephesians.

"Can I go longer than seven minutes?" you ask. Sure, if you want to! Seven is just a good place to start and every good thing starts somewhere. So I challenge you to begin here... Start with **7!!!**

Perhaps you're thinking, "But why should I get in the Word every day? Give me some reasons." Okay. First, let's identify some *wrong* reasons...

Wrong reasons to have a daily QT:

--*Because God will bless me if I do.* Be careful. Bible reading isn't a rabbit's foot ("If I just rub my Bible I'll get what I really want from God!").

--*Because I have to earn God's favor.* No! God will not love you any more if you have a QT today. He loves you and accepts you by His grace in Christ. Be careful of legalism which equates a right standing with God based on what I DO. That's self-righteousness. True righteousness is mine because of *grace*. But if I believe that, then I will express my desperate need for His grace by taking advantage of the *means of grace*, namely the Word and prayer.

--*Because I feel like it.* You won't every day.

--*Because I'll get something from it every time.* Not necessarily. What you will get from it is discipline. You will learn to live life based on what pleases God, not based on your feelings.

A baby has a natural appetite. He craves. He lets you know if he's hungry. What that baby does not have is the ability to discern what is best for him. And so, left to himself, a toddler will fill his belly with candy. His taste buds need to be developed.

So for the child of God. We need to learn to develop our taste buds. It takes time to create new tastes. Don't be discouraged if it's hard to get in the Word several days in a row. Keep doing it whether you feel like it or not. In time you will *want* to be in His Word and will feel something is missing if you aren't.

Right reasons to have a daily QT:

--*Because it enables us to know God better.* Psalm 119:18, 41-42

In order to get to know someone you must spend time with them. That's true in your relationship with your spouse or kids, and in your relationship with God.

--*Because sanctification (i.e. growing) is linked to the Word.* John 17:17

God uses His Word to accomplish the process of sanctification.

Therefore, if we want to grow we *must* be consistently in the Word.

--*Because God's Word keeps us from sin.* Psalm 119:9 & 11, 133

If you want to overcome sin in your life, you need to bathe regularly in the Word, as the psalmist acknowledged.

--*Because it prepares us for the spiritual battle that day.* Eph. 6:17

We are in a battle! But God has given us an offensive weapon with which to fight, "the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God." A sword does little good while tucked away in its sheath. You must take it out and use it! So the Word of God.

To help us fulfill the "Seven Minute Challenge" we will be reviewing the Quiet Times in Growth Groups. For the first ten minutes of each week, the GG leaders will be asking, "How many days did you have a QT this week?" and then will ask you to share with one another what you have learned.

Will we feel uncomfortable? Yes. Will it be easy to get consistent in our QT with God? No. It takes time to break old habits and start new ones. Repetition is necessary. So is accountability. But will it be worth the struggle? Absolutely! God will be honored as we show Him we treasure His Word, and we will *grow!*

To Do After Message:

1. Introduce Growth Group Leaders
2. Pray for the upcoming Growth Groups
3. Pick up and pay for GG books and Quiet Times at table