

## Wheelersburg Baptist Church 1/18/04 Brad Brandt

### "Value #2—Edification: The Importance of Growing" \*\*

Main Idea: My aim in this message is to search the Scriptures and answer three questions about edification. In other words, we're going to learn about the importance of growing.

I. What makes edification necessary?

- A. Sin does.
- B. Salvation does.
  - 1. We enter God's family as babies (1 Pet 2:2).
  - 2. We are one part of a body (Eph 4:11-13).
  - 3. We are one branch in the vine (John 15:1-4).

II. What makes edification possible?

- A. The Lord wants His Body to grow.
  - 1. The potential is there (1 Pet 2:4-5; Eph 2:19-22; 1 Cor 3:6-7).
  - 2. The evidence is there (Acts 4:4; 9:31; 16:5).
- B. The Lord wants you to grow.
  - 1. We're supposed to grow in faith (2 Thes 1:3-4; 2 Cor 10:15).
  - 2. We're supposed to grow in grace and knowledge (2 Pet 3:18; Col 1:10).
  - 3. We're supposed to grow in Christ-likeness (Luke 2:52; Col 1:28; Rom 8:29; 2 Pet 1:5-11).
- C. The Lord tells us how to grow.
  - 1. It takes His Word (Acts 20:32).
  - 2. It takes our words (Eph 4:29; 1 Thes 5:11).
  - 3. It takes love (1 Cor 8:1).
  - 4. It takes proper choices in Christian liberties (Rom 14:19; 15:2; 1 Cor 10:23).
  - 5. It takes the proper use of spiritual gifts (Eph 4:11-16; 1 Cor 14:4, 26).

III. What makes edification a reality?

- A. Make sure you are abiding in Christ (John 15:5-8).
- B. Make sure you are feasting in Christ's Word (1 Pet 2:2).
- C. Make sure you are serving in Christ's Body (Eph 4:16).
  - 1. In order to grow, the Body needs me.
  - 2. In order to grow, I need the Body.

A Personal Question: Am I really growing?

When I was about 17 I bought a baby Holstein heifer to raise. I fed it powdered milk by bottle for weeks, then began the solid food. The calf was getting stronger and bigger as the days passed.

Then one early Spring day I turned the calf loose in the barn lot so it could get some fresh air. I can still see how it reveled in that taste of freedom, heading across the lot, skipping along the way.

Until tragedy struck. The calf attempted to jump off the concrete lot and down onto the grass. It was less than a 10 inch drop off—dozens of other calves had done it before. But for this animal something went wrong. When the front hooves hit the dirt its back snapped and the animal crumpled to the ground, paralyzed from the mid-section back. The poor creature stopped growing and in just a few weeks died.

Living beings are supposed to grow and it's tragic when they stop growing. That's true for baby calves. It's also true for people, especially God's people.

Today we're going to talk about the importance of growing. Last week I posed a question. *What are the values of a strong Christian and a strong church?* That's the question we're seeking to answer in our current series *Get a Grip*. Last week, in introducing the series, I shared with you an illustration to help visualize these seven values:

Value #1—A disciple is a person who is committed to worship.

This is illustrated by the first finger, for worship must be first place in the value set.

Value #2—A disciple is one who is committed to edification.

The middle finger (which is the longest) represents edification, the need for growth.

Value #3—A disciple is one who is committed to love.

The ring finger illustrates love. By this all men will know you are my disciples...

Value #4—A disciple is one who is committed to service.

The pinky finger, the smallest finger, represents the need to serve in the little things.

Value #5—A disciple is one who is committed to evangelism.

A thumb's up signal signifies good news which is what we have to share with people.

Value #6—A disciple is one who is committed to fellowship.

A hand will not function if it's not connected to the wrist and the rest of the body.

Value #7—A disciple is one who is committed to obedience.

A hand is designed to follow the orders from the head. So with the Christian.

During these seven weeks we're exploring each of the values one by one. Last time we investigated value #1—worship. Today we move to #2—edification.

Just what is edification? The Greek term is *oikodome*, a compound word comprised of the terms "house" (*oikos*) and "to build" (*demo*). It's a construction term. The verb form, *oikodomeo*, likewise carries this emphasis on building. One lexicon defines the term as: "to increase the potential of someone or something, with focus upon the process involved—'to strengthen, to make more able, to build up.'"

The word itself ("edification") appears only once in the NIV (Rom 14:19), with three appearances of the verbal form (all in 1 Corinthians 14--verses 4, 5, and 17). To edify means "to build up" (which is why you'll generally see the terms "build up" instead of "edify" in the NIV).

The activity of edification is a non-negotiable if you want to be a strong Christian and if we are going to be a strong church. My aim in this message is to search the Scriptures and answer three questions about edification. To put it another way, we're going to learn about the importance of growing.

### I. Question #1: What makes edification necessary?

Simply put, two things make edification necessary.

A. Sin does. There's a phrase in the genealogy of Genesis 5 that jumps off the page. It appears over and

over. *And he died* (verses 5, 8, 11, 14, etc). When mankind fell into sin, man began to deteriorate. Mankind began to die.

Frankly, the world is not getting better, as the theory of evolution suggests. By its very nature sin destroys. Sin tears apart. It breaks apart families. It ruins health. It fragments churches. The nature of sin, therefore, makes edification necessary.

B. Salvation does. God is a saving God. He specializes at reversing the destructive effects of sin. But how does He do it? Think about the nature of salvation. Think of the pictures that the Scriptures use to explain our identity as saved people. These pictures make it clear that edification is absolutely essential. According to picture #1...

1. *We enter God's family as babies (1 Pet 2:2)*. Jesus told Nicodemus, "You must be born again (John 3:7)." That's true for every person. If you want to be right with God, it's not enough to be religious. You must be born into God's family—and that happens when the Spirit regenerates your heart and you receive Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord.

And though it's basic, don't miss this. We all enter the family of God the same way, *as babies*. That being the case, we must grow. Maturity doesn't just happen. Peter offered this counsel in 1 Peter 2:1-3, "Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. *Like newborn babies*, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it *you may grow up in your salvation*, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good."

The Greek verb for "grow," *auxano* can be translated "to increase" or "to grow." The term is used of plant growth in Mark 4:8, "Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, *grew* and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times."

We enter God's family as babies and as with babies, the maturing process is necessary. Indeed, it's expected and vital. A second picture puts it this way.

2. *We are one part of a body (Eph 4:11-13)*. Ephesians 4:11-13 states, "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that *the body of Christ may be built up* until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

We are a family and enter that family as babies. We're also a body, one part of a body and as such dependent upon the rest of the body for our growth and health.

3. *We are one branch in the vine (John 15:1-4)*. Jesus said in John 15:1-4, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me."

Jesus is the vine. We are the branches. Without the vine a single branch bears no fruit. Indeed, if separated from the vine a single branch dies.

Now what do family, the body, and a vine have in common? They all, by nature, are supposed to grow. These three pictures say tons to us about the need for edification.

## II. Question #2: What makes edification possible?

The short answer is, *the Lord does*. Remember, edification doesn't occur naturally. But when the Lord enters our lives, so does the potential for growth.

At this point we tend to think too individualistically. We think about our *personal* growth. God's interested in your growth as a person, but He has a bigger agenda first.

A. The Lord wants His Body to grow. As you scan the Scriptures you discover a couple of factors about corporate growth, the growth of the Body of Christ.

1. *The potential is there* (1 Pet 2:4-5; Eph 2:19-22; 1 Cor 3:6-7). In 1 Peter 2:4-5, Peter explains what makes edification possible, "As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, *are being built* into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

Please note that growth is a process. We are *being built*. God is the builder.

Another text explaining the potential for growth is Ephesians 2:19-22, "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too *are being built* together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."

If edification were up to us, we'd be in big trouble. But it's not. God wants to see His Body built up. He deserves the glory when it happens, too, as Paul made clear in 1 Corinthians 3:6-7, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow."

When we read the Scriptures we see that the potential is there. We also see...

2. *The evidence is there* (Acts 4:4; 9:31; 16:5). Scan the book of Acts and what do you see? The early church was a growing church. It grew up and it grew out. It matured and it increased in size. We see spiritual growth and numeric growth.

Acts 4:4 "But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men *grew* to about five thousand."

Acts 9:31 "Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it *grew* in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord."

Acts 16:5 "So the churches were strengthened in the faith and *grew* daily in numbers."

There's a second type of growth that is on God's agenda. In addition to His Body...

B. The Lord wants you to grow. That's you as a person. In what ways? The Bible mentions several. Here are three.

1. *We're supposed to grow in faith* (2 Thes 1:3-4; 2 Cor 10:15). Note what brought Paul cause for thanksgiving in 2 Thessalonians 1:3-4, "We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because *your faith is growing* more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring." The apostle emphasized a similar thought in 2 Corinthians 10:15, "...Our hope is that, as *your faith continues to grow*, our area of activity among you will greatly expand..."

Is your faith growing? Do you greater confidence in Him today than a year ago?

2. *We're supposed to grow in grace and knowledge (2 Pet 3:18; Col 1:10).* Peter exhorted in 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!"

Paul made this kind of growth a matter of prayer in Colossians 1:10, "And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God."

3. *We're supposed to grow in Christ-likeness (Luke 2:52; Col 1:28; Rom 8:29; 2 Pet 1:5-11).*

Though perfect, Jesus grew. Luke 2:52 states, "And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men." If Jesus grew, certainly we have no room to coast.

Indeed, the goal of growth is Christlikeness. It's what we're after according to Colossians 1:28, "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may *present everyone perfect [mature, complete] in Christ.*"

This is why God chose us to be His people, as Romans 8:29 explains, "For those God foreknew he also predestined *to be conformed to the likeness of his Son*, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."

Growth in Christlikeness is God's intent for us. It ought also be our intent.

2 Peter 1:5-11 "For this very reason, *make every effort to add* to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in *increasing measure*, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

I'm so thankful for the next point. The Lord not only wants us to grow, but...

C. The Lord tells us how to grow. We need five essentials.

1. *It takes His Word (Acts 20:32).* Listen to Acts 20:32, "Now I commit you to God and to *the word of his grace*, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified." What can the Word do? It can build up God's people. It edifies them.

The opposite is true. When churches teach manmade ideas the result is controversy rather than edification.

The fact is, while a diet of God's Word will build up God's people, a diet of man-made notions will stunt personal growth. It's like trying to live on junk food.

If we're going to grow it takes God's Word. In addition...

2. *It takes our words (Eph 4:29; 1 Thes 5:11).* Yes, the words that we speak have the power to edify, and conversely, to tear down. Ephesians 4:29 makes that clear, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for *building others up* according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."

If our church is going to grow in 2004 we need to be people who use our words to build others up. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 reiterates, "Therefore encourage one another and *build each other up*, just as in fact you are doing."

3. *It takes love (1 Cor 8:1)*. We can have the best Bible teaching in the Word, but if the teaching lacks a context of true love, we're in trouble. 1 Corinthians 8:1 says, "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." Take stock of your own life as you hear the following poem, "A Builder Or a Wrecker:"

*As I watched them tear a building down  
A gang of men in a busy town  
With a ho-heave-ho, and a lusty yell  
They swung a beam and the side wall fell*

*I asked the foreman, "Are these men skilled,  
And the men you'd hire if you wanted to build?"  
He gave a laugh and said, "No, indeed,  
Just common labor is all I need."*

*"I can easily wreck in a day or two,  
What builders have taken years to do."  
And I thought to myself, as I went my way  
Which of these roles have I tried to play?*

*Am I a builder who works with care,  
Measuring life by rule and square?  
Am I shaping my work to a well-made plan  
Patiently doing the best I can?*

*Or am I a wrecker who walks to town  
Content with the labor of tearing down?  
"O Lord let my life and my labors be  
That which will build for eternity!"*

4. *It takes proper choices in Christian liberties (Rom 14:19; 15:2; 1 Cor 10:23)*. By Christian liberties I am referring to gray areas, things that the Bible doesn't prohibit but that cause some with weaker consciences to stumble over.

Listen to the following instructions, each taken from a "Christian liberties" text:

Romans 14:19 "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to *mutual edification*." Friends, there are things we have the right to do that we will choose not to do if our goal in the church is edification.

Romans 15:2 "Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to *build him up*."

1 Corinthians 10:23 "Everything is permissible—but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible—but not everything is constructive." In the KJV, "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all *things edify not*."

Dr. Bonar once said that he could tell when a Christian was growing. In proportion to his growth in grace he would elevate his Master, talk less of what he himself was doing, and become smaller and smaller in his own esteem, until, like the morning star, he faded away before the rising sun.

5. *It takes the proper use of spiritual gifts (Eph 4:11-16; 1 Cor 14:4, 26).* Let's return to Ephesians 4, this time noting why God gives gifts to His church:

Verse 11-12 "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to [purpose clause] prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ *may be built up*." There's why God gifts us, for the good of others, namely the edification of others in the Body.

Here's the goal of edification, verses 13-16, "Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and *become mature*, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things *grow up* into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, *grows and builds itself up* in love, as each part does its work.

Note the emphasis on growing up and building up. And it's not just *my* growth that matters. It's *yours*, too. It's *our* growth as a church.

Paul gave further explanation in another "spiritual gifts" text, 1 Corinthians 14. Note the focus on others in verse 26, "What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done *for the strengthening of the church*."

Answer this. What does it take to be healthy spiritually? Think about what it takes to be healthy *physically*. You've heard your doctor's counsel, no doubt. It takes a proper, balanced diet—three meals a day and don't skip breakfast! It takes exercise. It also takes getting rid of destructive habits that would tear your body down, like smoking, alcohol, and so on.

It's no different with spiritual health. To be healthy spiritually you need the same three things: a proper, balanced diet, exercise (that's using your spiritual gifts in Christian service), and intentional action to remove ungodly influences (in Eph 4 terms, "put off").

I want you to know something. We try to offer a balanced and comprehensive plan for your spiritual growth and health at Wheelersburg Baptist Church, to the glory of God. We offer you opportunities to eat, exercise, and put off sinful hindrances. It's a whole package: Sunday School is a place to learn and link with other believers; in the Sunday morning service we worship God as a congregation and provide needed exposition of His Word; in the Sunday evening service we offer teaching designed to complement the morning service and take it a step further; on Wednesday evenings we engage in a small group, interactive Bible study and prayer time. We also offer opportunities for service, such as hospital visitation, counseling, teaching, ushering, greeting, and more.

Do you need it all? To be a Christian, no. But if you want to be a healthy, growing Christian, you need to view church more than as a place you go once a week to listen to a sermon. I urge you to become involved in the *life* of the church. Make edification a priority, your edification, yes, but also the edification of your brothers and sisters.

### III. Question #3: What makes edification a reality?

We're in trouble when we are not growing. You may remember the story of the school principal who protested to his superintendent because he wasn't given a certain promotion. "After all," he said, "I've had twenty-five years' experience." "No, Joe," said the superintendent, "that's where you are wrong. You have had one year's experience twenty-five times!"

Similarly, some church members might say, "I've had twenty years of Christian experience." But in reality, they've had one year of experience, the year they tasted God's goodness in salvation, made a profession, and joined the church. After the first year they started coasting. Oh, they may come to church every week, but they're not growing. And if they're honest about it, they'll admit they don't come to church with the intention to grow. They don't see the need. They're saved. They're in the family of God. They're going to heaven. To them, growth is kind of optional.

Please realize it's not to God. Therefore, I want to be very practical and specific in answering this third question. If you want to grow, you need to make sure of three things.

A. Make sure you are abiding in Christ (John 15:5-8). Jesus said in John 15:5, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

This is a fundamental reality. To have the potential to grow, you must be *in Christ*. To experience growth you must *abide in Christ*. Christ came to do for us what we can't do for ourselves. His perfect life, His payment for our sins, His triumph over death—He did it all for us. Are you in Him?

Go a step further. Are you abiding in Him? Are you letting Him reproduce His life in you? If you want to grow, don't bypass this. Make sure you are abiding in Christ.

B. Make sure you are feasting in Christ's Word (1 Pet 2:2). I mean *feasting*. Not dabbling. Not doing what children often do who play with their food. We need to *feast* in the Scriptures.

There's no shortcut here. In the words of 1 Peter 2:2 if we want to grow we need to *crave*. "Like newborn babies, *crave* pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation."

Dr. Howard Hendricks tells of a professor who made an impact on his life. He passed his home many times, early in the morning and late at night, and often saw him pouring over his books. One day, Hendricks asked him, "Doctor, I'd like to know, what is it that keeps you studying? You never cease to learn."

His answer: "Son, I would rather have my students drink from a running stream than from a stagnant pool."

Hear the following parable. Once upon a time there was a tree. It was a lovely-looking tree, shapely, strong, and stately. But appearances are not always to be trusted, and they were not in this case. For the tree knew inwardly that its massive strength was beginning to wane. When the wind was strong it had felt itself shaking ominously, and heard suspicious creaks. So, wisely, it took itself in hand. With much effort it grew another branch or two, and then looked stronger and safer than ever. But when the next gale blew, there was a terrific snapping of roots and, but for the support of a friendly neighbour, it would have been flat on the ground.

When the tree had recovered from the shock, it looked at its neighbour curiously. "Tell me," it asked, "how is it that you have not only stood your ground, but are even able to help me, too?"

"Oh," replied the neighbour, "that's easy. When you were busy growing new branches, I was strengthening my roots."

Are you feeding yourself the Scriptures on a consistent basis? The feast is there!

However, since eating without exercising leads to poor health, I offer a third charge.

C. Make sure you are serving in Christ's Body (Eph 4:16). Christian service is like exercise. Once again I call your attention to Ephesians 4, this time to the final statement in verse 16, "From him the

whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as *each part does its work.*"

If growth is to occur in the church, each member of the body must contribute. Paul says each part must "do its work." To put it plainly...

*1. In order to grow, the Body needs me.* Your church will not be what God intends for it to be without you. The Spirit gave you a spiritual gift that the Body needs. When you miss church, or even when you come but refuse to use your gift, the rest of the church suffers. Say it aloud for it's true. In order to grow, the Body needs me. And...

*2. In order to grow, I need the Body.* You cannot grow all by yourself. Can you be a Christian and not go to church? Yes, but you cannot be a growing Christian and give low priority to that for which the Lord Jesus gave His life. He loved His church enough to die for it. Do you love what He loves? Are you using what He loaned you to serve His church?

I'd like each of us to ask ourselves a very important question as we conclude...

A Personal Question: Am I really growing?

You can grow, and you can grow today!