

Week 1 Made To Grow

Week 1 - Summary

Before we committed our lives to Christ our attention and effort was focused on the decision to follow Christ or not. In some ways placing all of that attention on the decision to follow Christ may have left the impression that becoming a Christian was the goal. In fact, our baptism into Christ was just the starting point for a journey of transformation and growth. The goal of accepting Christ is to become like Christ. Just like our physical bodies were made to grow and mature, so to our formation in Christ is made to grow and mature. The Christian life is a life of change, growth and transformation.

Things that stunt our growth

Week 1 Made To Grow

When we were born again in Christ we were born again from above. Like Nicodemus in the gospel of John, we began a new life. The image of being born again carries with it the image of growth from being “babes in Christ” to being “mature in Christ.” When we were born into Christ, we began a journey, a journey of transformation with a goal of perfection, we were made to grow. In our study of Christian growth we will explore the goal of our growth, the general pattern of maturing in Christ, and the idea of transformation.

Goal is to “be perfect”

Too often the goal of Christianity is portrayed as simply “getting to heaven” or saving souls from eternal destruction. There is no doubt that this is an important result of our salvation through Christ, but there is something missing in our thinking when we focus entirely on the end reward. God has an interest in the kind of people we are in this world, before we reach heaven. The mission of sending Christ into the world was much more than simply a recruiting mission as if Christ were selling life insurance for eternal life. Christ died because of sin, to redeem humanity from the power of sin and give them power over sin so that we could be a people who demonstrate the power of God alive in us while we are still on earth. God invites us to enjoy the rewards of heaven, but he wants us to aim for perfection in this life.

- ❖ *Matt 5:48 “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”*
- ❖ *2 Cor 7:1 Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.*
- ❖ *2 Cor 13:11 Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.*
- ❖ *Col 1:28 We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. 29 To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.*

The idea of perfection is one that we easily dismiss as impossible and unnecessary. We feel it is impossible because we believe the idea that since the fall of man in Genesis, humanity has been infected with an incurable trait of sin. This belief in “total depravity” creates a healthy view of our inferiority to God but it also can create an unhealthy view of our inability to make progress. When God saved us by grace he did not lower his standards for humanity, instead he empowered us with the ability to fulfill his creation intent by giving us the Spirit. (Rom 8) We will spend more time talking about that in week 2. For now the important thing to realize is that God saved us to begin the process of making us perfect in Christ

Generalized Pattern of Growth

The idea of growth cuts across many different dimensions of our life. Our growth in Christ involves the degree to which we purify our lives from sin, our ability to yield our will and life into God’s hands, our

preparation for works of service and to teach. Yet another way of describing our growth in Christ is to speak of growth in faith releasing us from the need for external assurances of our salvation.

❖ *Eph 4:11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 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.*

❖ *Heb 5:11 We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. 12 In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! 13 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.*

❖ *1 Pet 5:-11 ...5 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. 8 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. 9 But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.*

Hypothetically we may imagine that there are some “steps” that form a general pattern of growth which begins the day we became Christians and will continue until we join Christ in Heaven. This is not a firm or fixed pattern but more of a rough thought model.

Forming <i>Solidify Christian Identity</i>	Growing <i>Finding My Place</i>	Leading <i>Poured Out</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanding circle of Christian relationships • Reorienting sense of identity • Forming Spiritual disciplines • Successfully fighting sin • Growing in knowledge of Scriptures • Increased understanding of God's value system • Gathering stories of faith and spiritual growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy spiritual disciplines habits • Discovery of gifts / talents • Increasing use of talents & time for God's purposes • Explore passion / calling • More in-depth study • Forming spiritual relationships with others • Comfortable in relationships with non-Christians • Comfortable sharing personal stories of faith 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain personal spiritual growth • Involved in ministry efforts • Lead ministry efforts • Aware of spiritual gifts and effectively using them for kingdom purposes • View possessions as resources for God's purposes • Life decisions are organized around God's will and purpose • Looking after spiritual health of others

Transformation

The basic idea behind Christian growth involves the idea of transformation. Transformation is the process of being changed from the inside out. Changed in the things we value, the ways we think, the criteria for our decisions, our ideas of entertainment, pleasure, purpose, our whole attitude about life. It is a cooperative process involving God and us.

❖ *Rom 12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. 2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.*