

Disciples: Grow

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[0 : 00] Okay, keep your Bibles open to that page in 1175. That's one of the number of passages that we'll be looking at over the course of tonight.

As I said, Jeff was meant to be preaching tonight as well, but fortunately he can't be here. The good news is that I've heard his sermon twice today at 8.30 and 10.30, but I'm not going to deliver it because I can't do what his sermon like Jeff does.

I've got his notes here, so that's the other good thing. But what I'm going to do is I'm going to try and improvise and follow his outline from what he's prepared.

So if you can take out your outlines, this is what we're going to work through. And I'm going to get your help tonight as well because there are three points on the outline and at each point I will point you to the passage and then give you two or three minutes.

So find your little group of four or five people that you can just talk among yourselves based on what I'm going to ask you and then that will give me time to sort of work out what Jeff was trying to say.

[1 : 12] And then when you come back, I'll be able to say that. There will be a roving mic as well. So if you want to contribute and help me, that would also be great. So let me pray and ask for God's help that his spirit might do his work despite my lack of preparation.

Let's pray. Father, we just pray and ask that your word will come alive to us, that your spirit will teach us, give us all wisdom as we as members of Christ's body, each one of us doing our part causes each other to grow tonight as we look at your word.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. I'm pretty sure that some of you young people, me excluded, would have heard it said of you.

Maybe it's your grandparents. Maybe it's older people. When they've not seen you for a while, that you've turned up in their house or something and said, wow, Michael, you've grown.

And, you know, I don't know how you feel about that. I know that sometimes I see that kind of facial reaction from some of you, like you don't really want to be told again that you've grown. And particularly when you get to my age, if somebody ever says to me, Mark, you've grown, it's not a good sign, is it?

[2 : 28] Now, it's obviously, when we talk about physical growth, pretty obvious when we've grown, haven't we? But the question is, how do we know when we've grown spiritually and in Christ?

That's what we're going to try and work out tonight together. And Ephesians chapter 4, verse 11 to 16 is one of the number of passages that we will be looking at.

Now, Jesus, obviously, when he was with his disciples, taught them and saw them grow. And over that time in the Gospels, we see them grow.

And many of them even came to write the New Testament. Now, the other person, of course, that Jesus ministered to and appeared to was the Apostle Paul.

And so, Paul, in this passage today in Ephesians, which was just read to us by Jackson, describes what Christ did for the sake of the church to build up or cause them to grow.

[3 : 35] So, looking at verse 11, again in your Bibles and on the slide, we read that Christ himself gave the Apostles, the Prophets, the Evangelists, the Pastors and Teachers to equip his 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 to become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

So, God gave his church people for its growth. And his goal was to bring them to not just understanding but maturity in Christ.

And so, according to Jeff's outline here today, the first aspect of growing is that of growing up. And so, I'd like you now to turn to your Bibles there and just keep going a little on from where I've read to 14 and 16 again and just talking about yourselves, see if you can identify markers of this growing up.

How can we tell that Christians and the church have grown up? All right, so talk about yourselves for about two or three minutes and then I'll call you back and you might be able to help me answer that question.

How do we know that Christians and the church are growing up from those verses? Go for it. Okay.

[5 : 11] Michael's got a roving mic here. Anyone want to help me say what are the indicators or the marks of growing up in Christ from these verses? Anyone?

Well, from our group, combined effort is to be rooted. So, not to be wishy-washy but to be rooted in the gospel.

Great. Great. Yep. Thank you. Anyone else? Dean over here and then Peter.

Yep. Very similar idea but to be stable, I guess not to be deceived easily.

Yep. Yep. So, verse 14 there. Yep. Blown about. Yes. You're speaking the truth in love.

[6 : 14] Speaking the truth in love. Great. Okay. Oscar. Last one. Our group said discernment.

Knowing that what the gospel is so well that we're able to discern what's not the gospel as to not get tossed to and fro. Yep. All right. Great. Okay. Okay. So, that's all really good answers.

And I'm sure if we dig more, we will be able to find a bit more as well. But we all know, don't we, that we can grow up in age but actually not grow up in maturity. Can't we?

Hopefully that's not speaking of you. But you've known of people that have not grown up even though they've grown older. And that's true as Christians as well and even as a church that we can grow.

I mean, we can sort of age as disciples of Jesus, become a Christian for a long time, but still not grow in maturity. Jeff here has given us three phrases to sort of summarize.

[7 : 15] Primarily verses 14 to 16. And he says that the mark of growing up or adulthood spiritually is, firstly, showing resilience amidst tumultuous spiritual winds.

So, that's the bit about not being tossed back and forth by every wind of doctrine. Knowing the truth of the gospel, as Sammy said, and knowing right from wrong, as Oscar was saying.

That's the first point. Secondly, he says the mark is also to speak God's truth to each other in love. Speaking the truth in love, verse 15, which is what Peter identified as well.

And that's interesting, isn't it? Because it's not just speaking the truth, but speaking the truth in love. It's the manner of speaking as well as just to provide what is true.

And so, being mature is a matter of being able to do that in a loving way, with the aim of growing everyone in maturity.

[8 : 17] And the last one, which we then want to talk a bit about as well, is that growing in maturity is also, as an individual, connection to Christ and his body, so that we might serve and build each other up.

That is, growing up, you're not just growing up as an individual Christian, but you're growing up as part of the body of Christ, because the aim is then to serve and build each other up.

And that is the picture there of the whole body joined together, held together by every supporting ligament, and building itself up in love, each part doing its work.

And here, I think Jeff had a special word for us as the 5pm congregation, because in a sense, it's now a month since we've sent out our brothers and sisters to St. John's, and some of us are probably feeling it.

There's a bit more empty spaces here. We miss some of the relationships that we enjoyed, seeing our fellow brothers and sisters here each Sunday.

[9 : 20] And for some of us, we even may have looked up to these brothers and sisters. But the reminder that Jeff had for us was that, actually, God has been doing this in our midst at 5 o'clock for a long time now.

Ever since we became one church, combining Word Sunday and the 6pm congregation into one congregation, that was eight years ago, God has been working to grow us as, you know, we were smaller in number than what we were eight years ago, but God has been growing us in number.

But numbers are not so important, so much as to all of us sitting under God's Word, growing together, not individually, but growing together, and then serving one another as we build each other up in faith and maturity.

And so by the power of God's Spirit, God is going to continue to do that work among us. Even as we attain, and the picture here is a beautiful one, attain in verse 13, to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

So we're not just individually mature, we're together as a body, singular body, mature even as we reflect our head, Jesus Christ Himself.

[10 : 38] All right, so that's growing up, and then we're going to move on to growing out now. And for this, we actually have another passage. So I want you to turn with me to the book or the letter of Colossians, which is just two letters away.

So Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, chapter 2, verse 6 and 7, and then chapter 3, verse 12 to 17.

So let's start with verses 2, chapter 2, verse 6 and 7. So that's page 1183. And as I'm reading it, we're going to be growing out now.

We're talking about growing out. So just have a think about what aspects of growing out might be described in these verses. So verse 6, So then, just as you receive Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in Him, rooted and built up in Him, that's similar to the Ephesians passage, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thanksgiving.

All right, so that's 6 and 7. And then you turn to chapter 3, on the next page, 1184, and look at verse 12 to 14.

[11 : 55] And some of you who are here dressing up yesterday, we covered this same passage as well. So verse 12 of chapter 3, Therefore as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, close yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you, and over all these virtues, put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

So there's some overlap with the Ephesians chapter 4 passage, but there are some new things as well. So, back in your little conversation groups, I'll give you another two, three minutes, to just talk about what aspects of growing out do you see in these two passages here.

All right, off you go. Okay. All right. Any volunteers this time? Now that you know that there are no wrong answers, more confident.

Charlie. How do we see growing out? Yes. People are forgiving those who wrong you. Yep.

[13 : 10] Yep. Growing out is being outward looking, so I think like what you preached from yesterday compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience are about serving others, caring with each other, forgiving one another, looking outward.

Yep. Great. One more last one. Joe.

Is it Joe? Or Oliver? No, he did. Means to like reflect, I guess, God's actually said, well not like being, forgiving others in your own lives.

So you said something like reflecting. Sorry, did it not pick up? Not the first sentence. Reflecting our faith in God throughout these and speech towards others.

Yeah, okay. So you brought out the idea that it's what God has done in your life then reflected in your actions to other people growing out. Okay, so thank you for that. all very helpful suggestions.

[14 : 16] The one that everyone missed, maybe, is Colossians 2, verse 6 and 7. There's one bit in there, and it's in the bowl there, and that is overflowing with thanksgiving.

That one, it's so obvious, isn't it? Out, flowing out, over, there, but I didn't pick it up either until Jeff pointed it out. Anyway, so overflowing with thanksgiving.

And that's true, isn't it? That when we let, growing out is about letting what Christ has done or is doing in our life flow out.

And that's what, exactly what Joe was saying. And the first thing it does is it flows out in thanksgiving because of what God has done in how we thank God not just with words but thank God with the way we live then an expression of that thankfulness.

And so I want to ask whether you've experienced that, that your life is one of thanksgiving because you know how much God has done for you and that part of growing out is then reflecting that in your words but then also in the other passage reflecting it in how we treat others the way that God has treated us with compassion, with kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, and love.

[15 : 35] because that is different from growing up, isn't it? Growing up is about understanding, knowing, being more mature in your mind but allowing then that maturity to flow out in how we treat other people and love one another.

That is the expression of growing out, isn't it? And the idea of overflowing is an apt one, isn't it? Because you're not like your well is dry and you're just trying to pump it out kind of, right?

It's the fact that you've been so blessed by God that you're being filled up by what Christ has done in your life by the Spirit that it overflows, it sort of drips over, you can't help it, right?

When you're full, all that happens is that it sort of, you know, when the dams are full, it needs to spill over and that's what's happening with us when we are growing out. We're so filled with what God has blessed us with that we can't help but just bless other people as well, serve them, love them, speak words of blessing and kindness and encouragement to them.

And so that's a beautiful picture, isn't it? That as we're growing up, we ought to be growing out as well and you ought to be praying that for one another. All right, let's go now to the third one which is growing in.

[16 : 57] That sounds a bit weird, doesn't it? Like an ingrown tonia. But the two passages that Jeff's prepared for us is on the slide, Ephesians chapter 3 verse 14 to 17.

He's only got the 16 and 17 but let me read that and again, pick up the in bits and maybe just looking at the word in in the passage might help.

Firstly, I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his spirit in your inner being so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

And then the second passage is from Colossians again. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts since as members of one body you were called to peace and be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach admonish one another with all wisdom.

Alright, so let's go back into your groups again and have a think now what is it about growing in that's different from growing up and growing out? Alright, so talk, use those two verses and then I'll get some people to share again.

[18 : 09] Okay, anyone wants to help this time around? As a team of five we said showing gratitude, peace and strength by Christ in our hearts.

Right, okay. Sue, the power and then Stephen. These verses are picking up that picture of God's spirit changing us from the inside to enable us to grow up and out.

Yep, exactly. Thanks. Christ dwelling in and ruling in you. Yep, great.

Yeah, so I think you get the picture. Growing in is about our internal health as it were, spiritual health. We talk about how you're going spiritually. That's another way of talking about it.

It's about what's going on inside. And many of you might know if you're gardeners or plant growers and things like that, you see a tree growing, like growing tall, many leaves.

[19 : 19] Outwardly, it may be strong and spreading and having lots of fruit. But from time to time, there might be things going on inside the tree that's infestation or something.

and then you start to begin to see signs of that, don't you, with black spots on leaves or sort of things growing on the bark or something like that.

And that's when you know that something inside the tree is not right. And that's the same with our own bodies, isn't it? We can sometimes be okay outside, but there may be things going not right in our own bodies internally, whether they're cancer cells or something's not going with the heart or whatever.

That's inner health, isn't it? And if we think about our own body, when it comes to spiritual health, we all know with, analogous to our physical health, it's what we put in often that affects the health of the body and what comes out in terms of what we are able to give up, give out as an output.

And many of you will know that the kind of food we eat, for example, affects, good or bad, the type of body that we often have.

[20 : 40] And so, in these verses, Paul talks about what should go in. And what should go in, as Sue was saying, is Christ, the spirit of Christ, the word, the message of Christ, and the peace of Christ.

And disciples grow in by being filled with the fullness of Christ so that they, again, overflow and they grow up. Jesus, in Mark 7, verse 14, says this, Listen to me, everyone, and understand this, nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them, rather than what comes out of a person that defiles them.

Later on, in verse 18, he says, Don't you see that nothing that answers a person from outside can defile them, for it doesn't go into their hearts, but into their stomachs, and then out of the body.

In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean. He went on, What comes out of a person is what defiles them, for it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly.

All of these, all these evils come from inside and defile a person. Now, when you first hear these words, it sounds a bit strange because we've all been talking about it's not what goes in, well, sorry, we've been talking about what goes in, but Jesus has now said it's not what goes in that matters, it's what comes out.

[22 : 08] But I think what we're to note is that it's not what goes into the mouth, which then goes into the stomach that matters, it's what is in the heart is what matters.

How we grow in affects what comes out. And Paul wants his readers to know it is Christ in them that makes a difference.

What we put in our hearts fundamentally affects how we grow up and out. And in New Chapter 6, Jesus gives an example, a good person brings up good things out of the good stored in their heart, and an evil person, the opposite, because the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.

This is Jeff's phrase here, not mine. It's almost like involuntary regurgitation of the heart. I thought that was pretty evocative.

But when you put bad food in your body, you can't stop it from coming out, and that's the same with our own lives. When we put good things in our hearts, then good things come out, and vice versa.

[23 : 17] So those are the three things. Growing up, which is about maturing. Growing out, which is about bearing fruit. And growing in, which is about character, Christ-likeness.

And so how we grow matters. And I wonder whether instead of us talking about each other physically, about how we've grown externally, wouldn't it be a good thing, is it, to be able to say to each other how we've grown in Christ.

And that's one good thing that we can apply, can't we? That when we see ourselves, not ourselves, but each other growing in Christ, then we ought to be encouraging each other and saying how you've grown.

Just encouraging and saying, wow, I can see that you have a Christ-filled heart. It's so encouraging to hear you speak the truth in love. It's so obvious you're continuing in Christ, and overflowing with thankfulness.

How often do we do that with each other? Compliment each other for how we're growing in Christ. Now, of course, we're not just trying to grow in order to get these compliments.

[24 : 30] That would be to defeat the point. But if we are growing and we see our brothers and sisters doing those things, then wouldn't it be a good thing, isn't it, to be saying these things to one another?

In lieu of saying, Mark, you've certainly grown, which can be taken in so many ways. So let me encourage you then to do that, that as disciples in Christ, we want to grow in Christ individually, but we also want to grow as the body of Christ.

And one way of doing that is to be able to encourage each other when we've seen each other grow in Christ. So let me pray now and ask that God will keep helping us to grow.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that we who trust in Jesus have received Christ as Lord. Help us to grow up in him. Help us to show Christ in our lives and fill our hearts with him.

Please cause our growth and lives in Christ to be a positive impact on each other and of the world around us. For the glory and honour of Jesus name we pray.

[25 : 40] Amen.