

Praying to Grow in Grace

by Geoff Thomas

This sermon emphasizes the importance of growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It highlights the need to progress in graciousness, knowledge of the Bible, conscientiousness, victory over besetting sins, and evangelistic earnestness. The speaker urges the audience to prioritize spiritual growth, actively feed their souls with God's Word, and diligently seek opportunities for spiritual nourishment and maturity.

Scripture: 2 Peter 3:18, Matthew 22:39, Romans 12:2, 1 Timothy 4:15, Galatians 6:1, Ephesians 6:14, 2 Timothy 2:15, Hebrews 5:14, 1 Corinthians 9:24, 1 Peter 3:15

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Knowledge of Christ"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It highlights the need to progress in graciousness, knowledge of the Bible, conscientiousness, victory over besetting sins, and evangelistic earnestness. The speaker urges the audience to prioritize spiritual growth, actively feed their souls with God's Word, and diligently seek opportunities for spiritual nourishment and maturity.

Transcript

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to Him be glory both now and forever. Amen. Second Peter chapter 3 and the last verse, verse 18.

Now one of the great goals of this conference is expressed by Peter in these words, that we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Many benefits come from conference, the renewal of friendships, and moments of inspiration from speakers, and meeting someone special perhaps. But unless we grow from our time here, grow in graciousness, grow in our knowledge of the Savior, then there will be a major failure in our gathering together.

Some of you know Don Whitney's helpful little book, Praying Scripture. And we gather to pray this Scripture. Lord help me to grow in graciousness.

Lord help me to grow in knowledge of the Savior. And who needs to pray that? Well, the baby Christians here. They need to pray it.

And then the man who is the most holy and most mature and has followed the Lord for many years, he needs to still pray this prayer. So what are we asking when we are asking that we may grow in grace and

in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ? Well firstly, we are asking for a genuine, progressive concern for the needs of others. Second commandment after to love God with all our hearts is to love our neighbor as ourselves.

And that's the impact that we are to make on one another, a real concern for other people. How is it with you? Do we know where the members of the congregation are? Do we know where there are doubts? Do we know where people are close to giving up? Do we know where the troubles and the problems are? And you'll say, well, the elders know. Well, perhaps they do.

But perhaps with some people, you know more. I'm not talking about inquisitive prying into the lives of other people, but I'm speaking about a concern for them. Do they have some fear? Do they have some worry? How can I help them? And so that's going to be our lives from now on.

We're going to be corns of wheat that fall into the ground and die, or we'll abide alone. We're going to be concerned that there'll be fruit in the lives of others and fruit in our own lives. The Savior then, He didn't come to be served, but He came to serve.

And so He calls us also that we're better servants of one another, more concerned, more aware of the needs. And how is it with you? How is it at mealtimes? Do you look to see if everyone's got what they want and you're concerned about them? You just don't look at the food in front of you? And the nicer seats, are you anxious to help other people? When you drive a car, do you let other people come in? And when there are family choices, do you ask your wife, well, what do you want to do? Do you ask children what their concerns are? It's a very sad life if it's just centered on you, an egotistical life. And so growing in grace, growing in graciousness, then shows itself in a progressive concern for the needs of others.

That's the first thing that we're praying for. And the second thing we are praying for is that we are growing in knowledge of the Gospel, of the Christian faith, and growing especially in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. A literal mental grasp with our minds of the teaching of Holy Scripture.

It may seem to you very elementary and very basic. But the first thing that a believer puts on is the girdle of truth. And the first thing that he must attend to in terms of spiritual knowledge and spiritual growth is familiarity with the truth, with the teaching of Scripture, with a system of Christian doctrine.

And it's all very well for us to speak of the perils of a dead orthodoxy, and I guess it's a real peril. There are people and their concern is not interest in the great foundational doctrines, but they're interested in the conundrum of theology. And let's avoid that.

And there are other people, and they're only interested in the doctrines that have given rise to controversies amongst Christians. Doctrines that men fight about. Doctrines that men disagree with.

And let's mortify that spirit too. But we are bound as Christians to make conscience of growing in our grasp of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and so on to Revelation and to that life of Adam and Noah and Abraham and the patriarchs and Moses and the deliverance from Egypt and then the time of the entry and Joshua and Judges and Samuel and the rise of Saul and the rise of David and Solomon and the great division that took place under him and then the destruction of the northern kingdom Israel and then the temporary Babylonian captivity of Judah and their return and the coming of Christ as promised. And we ought to know those things and know the letters.

And so when the Jehovah's Witness comes to your house and you say, do you know the Bible? Yes. Well, what? You say to him. What is the main theme of the letter to the Romans? And that's a good question to ask him because he won't know.

He'll know his stuff, but he won't know a question as important. Well, Ephesians is shorter. You say six chapters.

Tell me, what is the main teaching of Ephesians? And then he'll get a bit frustrated and angry with you. Well, now, come back and let me know because you're driving him to the Word, aren't you? To read the Word. And that is the only chance of him changing.

And so I'm saying to you, we have to soak ourselves in the Word. Marinate ourselves in the Word of God. Because if we're going to ask then a Jehovah's Witness to tell us what the main theme of Romans is, we'd better know it ourselves.

We'd better know it ourselves. So we ought to know about the Person of Christ, His deity, His humanity, His incarnation, His states as preexistent, humiliated, exalted, about His offices as prophet, priest, and king. We ought to know the great doctrines of God's sovereignty, of justification by grace through faith, of adoption, of union with Christ, of sanctification.

These teachings are not simply for theologians, but they are the stuff of believing meditation. They are the stuff of doxology. The great hymns are about those themes.

And if we're to be growing Christians, we are to be growing intellectually. We are to be growing theologically. We are to grow in our grasp of them.

And we are to grow in the emotional impact that they make upon our lives. That the Word of God lives in us. Because the Psalms begin by a man, his delight was in the law of the Lord.

And in that law, he meditated day and night. Thirdly, if we are praying this prayer that we might grow in graciousness, in grace, we are praying that we might progress in conscientiousness. That is, in responsiveness and obedience to our own consciences.

Because God has placed that monitor in our minds. And it reproves us when we do wrong, and it encourages us when we do right. Well, how is it with your conscience and you tonight? How are things between you and that monitor, that voice of God? You know, there are many consciences, and in Thomas Boston's words, they are too pernickety.

They condemn what God's Word doesn't condemn. And we must educate that conscience. Does the Bible condemn blood transfusions, for example? And there are other consciences, and they let anything pass.

They let pass what God's Word condemns. They are less sensitive than they should be. They are much too broad, much too open.

So we must always bring our conscience under the light of the Word of God. You know, the Puritan illustration then of the sundial. And the sundial will work if it's at the right angle and in regards to the light of the sun.

But on a bright moon like night, you can go out to your garden and you can look at a sundial, and there'll be a shadow, a moon shadow. And it will give you the totally wrong reading because it's not a moondial.

It's a sundial.

And so there is the conscience of the cannibal. And there is the conscience of the abortionist. And they are not living in accord with the Word of God who created the conscience, gives to us.

Now, let's suppose that you have an enlightened conscience. Let's suppose that you have the full light of God's Word on your conscience then. Are you carefully obeying it when you are emotionally disinclined? When you're lying on the floor in despondency and sulking and unhappy because your worst fears have been realized? When you're in the depth of depression and self-pity, and there's a duty that you have to attend to? It's a duty.

It's very unpleasant. It's very demanding. Do you do what your conscience tells you that you should do? Do you have the maturity to stand on your emotions and reject them in the face of their reluctance and aversion to attend what God commends us? There's no greater peril in the Christian life than to make our emotions the touchstone of our duties.

And time and again, we have to pick ourselves up off the floor of discouragement and say, I have a duty, and I know this is right, and I'm going to do it. Or again, let me ask you, are you conscientious about small things? Because there, most of all, Christians are tested. We don't have huge sacrifices to make, but every day, there are many little duties that you know has to be done.

And we have to pay careful attention to matters of detail because our Lord, He commends people who are faithful in little things. And so often, we are losing the battle in little things. It might seem to you not a big issue to be in prayer meeting on a Wednesday night there.

It might not seem a big issue to be in Sunday nights at church. A small thing. It might seem just a little thing to ignore writing a letter to someone to say thanks for all your kindness to me.

Certain things. But we must make conscience then. If we are going to grow in graciousness, our conscience, we respect it.

Whatsoever is not of faith is sin. And then fourthly, we must make conscience, we must make progress in victory over besetting sins. That's a great reality in the Christian life.

That there's some sin and you know it's a problem for you, isn't it? And you know you're not going to grow unless you deal with that particular sin. It's perfectly possible to be normal in every part of the Christian life there in your emotions and affections and will and so on. Everything seems to be in order except at one point.

You're in the grip of one temptation. You are dominated by one lust. You are entangled in the meshes of one particular sin.

And you see it in the world around you. It's called monomania. One man in every area, 99 out of the 100 areas of his life, he's straight down the line.

But there's one area of his life where he's warped and he's grasped by one sin. And we say, well, it may be mysterious that I'm not growing as I should be as a Christian. Is it so mysterious? Is the reason why I'm not growing as I should be because my spiritual life is diseased in one area? And unless it's dealt with, it's going to, just like a bug, a virus, just in one part of you and it affects the rest of you.

You're weak and listless and so on. You must deal with that besetting sin. Worldliness, prayerlessness, irritability, impatience, aggressiveness, what have you.

So, those are four. Oh, and then one more point in which when we are praying for growing in grace, we are praying that we should grow in evangelistic earnestness. Now, you know, when you first knew the Lord, you see it in the young convert.

It's lovely to see him, how bold he is. You tremble at times because he'll blurt out things that he might have said rather more sweetly, but he just sees the world's need and he sees Christ as the great Savior. And he speaks a word in and out of season.

And the mature amongst us, we smile and we may sneer even because much of it was immature. The witness was unwise and indiscreet and ineffectual, but that does not justify the fact that many Christians as they grow older, they grow more reticent and quieter and share their faith less and less. The vision of the world's lostness disappears.

And that's a maturity that our churches need to do without. It's expected sometimes. It's only the young people who go out on missions and work and go to Mexico for a week and so on.

And they haven't the equipment. They haven't the wisdom. They're great helpers, but they're not great leaders.

So as we've been coming now, we've been Christians many years, how is it with you and your evangelistic concern? Are you prepared to get involved in every true evangelistic cause? Are you prepared to support it and pray and give and cooperate? I know there's a lot of misplaced evangelism. I give statistics for evangelistic failure and you know all that. And that won't help us at all.

We must stand back from simply criticizing. And we have to be involved in every form of biblical evangelism. We have to do that.

And it's a sad thing for any Christian if that vision is gone. So, I'm saying those are the sorts of things that we are praying for when we hear the exhortation, the last words of Peter, but grow in grace. Grow in graciousness.

And we're talking about making progress and being concerned for other people. And growing in our knowledge of the Bible and what the Bible teaches. And growing in conscientiousness.

And growing in victory over besetting sins. And growing in evangelistic earnestness. And then very briefly as a postscript, how is this to be achieved? How are we as Christians going to grow? And the first answer is that it must be a priority in our lives.

These are Peter's last words, aren't they? Think of the life he lived. He preached at Pentecost and 3,000 were converted. Did you think he would sort of float along in the glow of that for the rest of his life? But he doesn't.

He's here and there. He's going to Cornelius' household. And he's traveling and he's speaking everywhere.

And his last words to people are, grow now. Grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's the greatest thing in our lives.

There's nothing more important for us. What's more important than this then? In the midst of all the other engagements and preoccupations and concerns, a Christian's relationship with God controls his life. It's what his life is built around.

And his greatest longing is to be more fit for the Master's use. This one thing I do, one thing, the apostles, every single eye Jesus speaks about. And I look at my own life and I wonder as the years have gone by, have I changed that scale of values and my sense of priorities? I know it's easy to react against extreme religionism.

A person just talks about religion and isn't interested in anything else. That's unbiblical too because in the Bible, they talk about all that's in God's creation. But there's a far greater peril than that sort of extreme.

And that's a reduction of religious aspiration, of religious vision, of a relegation of my relationship to Christ to not be the first thing, the greatest thing in my life. And at times I think it's happened to me and it's happened to other people. That things that should be primary have become secondary in my priorities.

And I think as I look at my old church and evangelicalism as I meet it, I see slackness and sloppiness coming into so many areas. You know, church life. For to me, to live is Christ.

That's what He says, isn't it? So if our chief end in life is not that, we are facing the most appalling and unhappy futures. And then secondly, it must be a priority. Secondly, our religious lives are not going to take care of themselves.

We can't simply expect our soul to nourish and fend for itself, to provide for itself. You have to see for it. I have all the weight of an apostle's command to say you have to grow.

You have to make sure you are growing. And that applies to every form of life. And we are concerned for our plants.

We give our tea to our neighbor and we say I'm going to Florida now for two weeks. Can you feed the plants? When I'm away, we're concerned about the bushes and the flowers. We're concerned about our animals, how they'll be fed.

And our minds and our intellects, what stuff we are feeding our minds with. Because they won't look after themselves. And so our souls.

Our souls won't look after themselves. We have to feed our souls. There's a program of provision for them.

Peter speaks in the 17th verse about being led away with the error of the wicked. And we all know people who've been led away because they didn't look after their own souls. There are people, and Paul tells Timothy about it, they have a form of godliness.

And they go to church and so on. But it's just a form. It's formalistic.

That's it. There's nothing under it. Nothing beneath it at all.

So let's be so careful about this. You know, not to prove I'm not a Puritan. Not to prove to people that I'm not narrow-minded.

That I believe in Christian liberty and the freedom of conscience. And to show people that I know about politics and I can speak about all these things. I wonder if some of the energy that we pour into that can be poured into my relationship with Jesus Christ.

And that I'm growing. I'm growing in my knowledge of Him, my Savior. And I'm feeding my soul.

So, how do we do this? Well, it must be a priority in our lives. And then we must be aware that we've got a duty to feed our souls that they won't look after themselves. And then Peter tells us in this 14th verse, to make every effort.

To be diligent, he says. Be diligent. And in what direction? Well, you've got to seek food for your souls.

But you've got to get away to a conference. Travel a long distance to be here. Drive 15 hours.

Drive through the night just to be here. And search for things that can nourish you and build up your knowledge and your graciousness. You don't want to be unfruitful and static.

But there's a dynamism and a maturing and a beauty and a fragrance and a loveliness about your life. You're seeking for truths that will do that, that will produce love and joy and peace and long-suffering and gentleness and goodness and faithfulness and meekness and self-control. You've got to fall in love with the Bible.

You've got to search it. You've got to ransack it. You've got to sit under the best ministry you can on a Sunday.

You've got to read the best books. You've got to sit and listen to older Christians as they talk together and they reminisce about how God has dealt with them over the years and learn from them the mysterious influence that one Christian can have over another. You seek good fellowship with other Christians.

And your hunger and your truth, you want the Word of God to come not in Word only, but power and the Holy Spirit and much assurance. Fall in love. Meditate upon Scripture and pray in Scripture.

So you read a verse like this, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior. And you say, Lord, me too, I want to grow. I want to grow.

This week, I've got a special time here, special privileges. Have me to grow in the grace and knowledge of my Savior, Jesus Christ. Because your souls won't grow without food.

And there's no food for the soul like the Word of God. There's no place to be better than before the face of Jesus Christ. You need that.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we've heard these searching exhortations, and so now we just roll them out before Thee. Oh, we wish we were much stronger and maturer and wiser and more loving and more patient and gentle and long-suffering.

Oh, we wish there was more purity and love for what is good and holy. Oh, Lord, give us a nudge. Give us a little push.

A big push this week. Oh, speak to us, humble us, encourage us in the Christian life this week that as a result of being in the conference, we'll grow in the grace and knowledge of our Savior, Jesus Christ, to

whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

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