

Lake Cities Community Church
Pastor Craig Schill
Series: Church Works
October 30, 2011

“Growing Up!”
1 Cor 3:6

CONTEXT FOR SERMON

The most important thing to understand when it comes to Christian growth is that the Bible teaches that we must become more and more like Jesus. We are to be conformed to the image of His will – to take His attitude as our own. But because we are *not* like Jesus – that gap – between what we need to be and where we are – that gap is the mandate for spiritual growth.

Jesus calls his church to be an incubator for spiritual maturation. He calls the leaders of His church to create an environment conducive to growth and progress. He calls every member of the church to grow and to seek opportunities for growth.

And so the question we must ask and answer is HOW? How do we grow spiritually? We will answer this question with have several texts – so I invite you to keep your fingers nimble as we move through the Scriptures together.

PREVIEW:

As we begin - **consider this seed**. If you were a gardener - how do you get the seed to grow and transform into what it is called to be? I am going to share with you three ways the Scripture teaches us that we grow spiritually – transformed into what God wants us to be. Each is vastly different, but absolutely necessary – resulting in spiritual growth. And I

would invite you to consider how each different item applies to your life this morning.

PLANT & WATER

The first way we get our little seed to grow is to plant it and water it. The most basic of steps. How many of you are aware that a seed has to be planted and watered? Of course! Without planting the seed – there is no potential for growth, and without water there is no potential for growth.

This past summer it was not only extremely hot – but it was bone-dry. And at the community pool in our neighborhood – apparently the people in charge of the landscaping thought, “Let’s see if our bushes can survive without water.” And without water – they died. Hundreds of feet of plants, dead, because they weren’t watered.

Seeds and then plants, must have soil and water in order to grow.

In terms of our *spiritual* growth – the planting and watering of seeds – is the impact of God’s Word in our life. We grow in response to the Word of God - it’s teaching waters us – it is what we need to grow spiritually. This is how God designed it to work.

Paul said: [1Cor. 3:6](#) I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth.

What were Paul and Apollos doing? They were preaching and proclaiming the Word of God.

And through planting and watering God caused the growing. The Prophet Isaiah said: [Is.](#)

[55:10](#) “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the

sower and bread to the eater; [Is. 55:11](#) So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without

succeeding *in the matter* for which I sent it.

I cannot stress enough to you and I – that if we are to grow up spiritually – to become more like Jesus Christ – we must be in the Word of God. Reading it. Studying it. Memorizing it. Obeying it. Spiritual growth can be as simple as taking your Bible, sitting down, and letting God change you through His Word.

Several years ago when I studied the pastoral letters – I counted how many time Paul commanded the pastors and church leaders to do certain things. For example, he brought up the importance of leadership quite often - 26 times. Got to have leadership in the church. He was also big on his pastors and leaders to compassionately care for the sheep and talked about this at least 35 times. Knowing how spiritual leaders are prone to burnout - he also warned frequently spiritual leaders to maintain their own spiritual vitality – again, at least 35 times. But when it came to the Word of God – he commanded its importance over 46 times!!! Preach the word. Teach the Word. Hold fast to the Word. Exhort in sound doctrine, be constantly nourished on the words of faith, silence false teachers, Exhort with authority - and on and on. It is the number one command of Paul to the local church.

If you want to grow spiritually – you **must, must, must** be an eager student of God's Word. And as a church – if we want people to grow spiritually – we must devote a considerable amount of our resources and time to the study of God's Word. Consider: The weekly sermon – a prepared message from the Bible. I spend 15-20 hours per week on the sermon – sometimes ½ my time – because we believe the Holy Spirit takes the Word and uses it to change lives to the glory of God. Consider also – Sunday School – prepared, intentional classes for all ages to help to encourage spiritual growth. All these things are different ways we try to give people opportunity to learn God's word.

Plan A

Responding to God's word with obedience is what I call "PLAN A". Plan A is the best plan – the original plan – the best plan. God's greatest desire is that we would grow through obedience. As we obey God we experience a greater sense of his presence, as we obey God bestows blessings. Plan A is simple obedience – faith being built into stronger faith. Joseph was a "PLAN A" Christian – his life is characterized by faithful obedience. Daniel was a "PLAN A" Christian – continually doing the right thing – even in very difficult situations. I wish I were more of a "Plan A" Christian. Studying, obeying and applying the Bible –always results in spiritual maturity and growth.

Missionary Amy Charmichael said; "Sometimes when we read the words of those who have been more than conquerors, we feel almost despondent: "I feel that I shall never be like that." But they won through step by step by little bits of wills, little denials of self, little inward victories by faithfulness in very little things they became what they are. No one sees these little hidden steps. They only see the accomplishment, but even so, those small steps were taken. There is no sudden triumph to spiritual maturity. That is the work of the moment." (Holy Sweat, Tim Hansel, 1987, Word Books Publisher, p. 130.) Plan A growth is often slow and steady – but it is a sure path to spiritual maturity.

SUPPORT

Now, let's move to the next, second, level of spiritual growth. As the plant grows up – it nearly always will need support. If the plant is not supported in some way – when the winds, and rains, and storms come - the plant will be destroyed.

Here is a picture of a climbing rose that I have on my fence at home – it is in a perfect location for growth with just the right mix of sun and shade. But the strong winds and rains recently nearly tore it off the fence. The plant could have been destroyed. And so the other day – I supported and protected the growth of the plant by securing the plant to the fence with eyebolts and string. For many of my other plants – I use a trellis – anchored in the ground to support the growing plant.

The same is true for you and I. When the storms of life come to us – through disease, car accidents, untimely deaths, wayward children, lost jobs, and on and on – our very faith can be threatened – but with support – the same challenges become enormous opportunities for spiritual growth and maturity.

[James 1:2](#) Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, [James 1:3](#) knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. [James 1:4](#) And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. The Greek word for “complete” is “telios” means to be “full grown, mature”, (BDAG). Spiritual growth happens when we go through various trials.

Now, the Bible here is not talking about consequences for sin – where we make our lives harder than the need to be, but rather general affliction and persecution that come from living in a fallen world and following Jesus. Such difficulty is unavoidable in this life. Jesus Himself said that we would suffer as He did – yet Jesus was without sin.

Bilbo Baggins in the book “The Hobbit” is on a journey and he realizes his the danger of the situation. So he asks the wizard Gandalf if there is an easier and safer path.

“There is,” responded Gandalf. “If you care to go 200 miles or so out of your way north, and twice that south. But you wouldn’t get a safe path even then. There are no safe

paths in this part of the world. So it is in this world – there are no safe paths. There are many, many afflictions in this life – and if you are young, or have not yet encountered any – be assured they are coming. Gandalf's advice? Stick to the forest-track, keep your spirits up, hope for the best, and with a tremendous slice of luck you may come out one day..." Be good, take care of yourselves – and DON'T LEAVE THE PATH!"

The exact same is true for us. There are no easy paths in this world. But just because things are hard - that doesn't mean the path is wrong – stay on the path – take care of each other. And through the difficult journey you will accomplish amazing things – and if in the end you endure and with God's help succeed – there will be great growth and rejoicing!

Paul said: [2Th. 1:4](#) therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure. Peter said: [1Pet. 2:20](#) For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer *for it* you patiently endure it, this *finds* favor with God.

Growing through suffering is not an easy way to grow, but it is a highly honorable way to grow. And to grow in such a setting – we also need a fellowship. And that is where the church comes into play. The church is the trellis – helping each plant be supported against the winds and storms of the world.

The theme of our Community Life Groups is: "Helping the Hurting" – that this is our intentional focus for small group ministry – support. Here, in the church, we pray for needs, we call to check up on people, we bring meals to those going through a hard time, we give money to our benevolence fund. All these things provide support to those who God has appointed to grow through suffering. We need to be extremely careful not to let one

another face storms by themselves – but to care for one another and together and together be pushed toward *telios* – maturity.

PRUNING

Our small seed has been planted and watered. And it has started to grow. We have taken our a trellis or other means to now support it so when the storms of life come it will not fall and break.

But now we have a new challenge. Now the plant starts to grow in unhealthy directions! The plant goes a little crazy and becomes out of control. It grows this way and that way – going where it should not go.

Here again are some pictures of my plants. I have an Evergreen Wisteria vine and climbing roses close to one another – and they like to grow into each other in order to fight and if left to their own design they would choke each other out if given the chance. So I need to prune them. Cut them back when they wander where they should not be.

Pruning is our third step. For you and I it is spiritual discipline. Pruning is when God rebukes and corrects us for our sin. God prunes us – he removes things from our life – so that, after that we can continue to grow and produce fruit.

Sometimes God prunes us in little ways with little pruning sheers. Other times he uses the loppers – and still other times – he has to get out the tree saw. Some of you know what I am talking about.

In the Bible – think of Peter who denied Jesus three times. Unlike general affliction - there was nothing noble about his sin and fear; but God used that to galvanize him into a powerful apostle, who changed the world. There was nothing good about David committing

adultery and murder - Yet, God broke David through that incident and made him into a godly King.

When we sin – that sin can be redeemed when we accept the consequences and rebukes and pruning discipline of the Lord. Solomon wrote: [Prov. 13:1](#) *A wise son accepts his father's discipline, But a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.* [Prov. 17:10](#) *A rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding than a hundred blows into a fool..* Jesus said: [John 15:2](#) *“Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.*

It is better to go with plan A – and not sin - but *when we do*, if we embrace God's discipline – even though it is painful - the growth can be powerful and lasting.

So, again, we can see that the church has a role to play. God has delegated authority to earthly leaders – elders and deacons. And from time to time, such leaders must step into the life of the church with a rebuke, a reproof, a word of warning. And even, at times, formal church discipline is necessary. And this is God's grace to us.

Let me read to you a few lines from our Relational Commitments – which governs those rare times we need to use formal discipline because of sin.

“On rare occasions God's discipline, like the discipline in a family with growing children, also may have a corrective purpose. When we forget or disobey what God has taught us, he corrects us. One way he does this is to call the church to seek after us and lead us back onto the right track. This process, which is sometimes called “corrective” or “restorative” discipline, is likened in Scripture to a shepherd seeking after a lost sheep. Biblical discipline is similar to the discipline we value in other aspects of life. We admire parents who consistently teach their children how to behave properly and lovingly

discipline them when they disobey. We value music teachers who bring out the best in their students by teaching them proper technique and consistently pointing out their errors so they can play a piece properly. And we applaud athletic coaches who diligently teach their players to do what is right and correct them when they fumble...

The same principles apply to the family of God. We, too, need to be taught what is right and to be lovingly corrected when we do something contrary to what God teaches us in his Word...

Summary

We have seen today three ways that we grow spiritually. First, through being planted and watered by the Word of God (Plan A) which is responding to God's word in obedience. Second, we grow as we are supported by the church through the storms and afflictions of living in a fallen world (which is a hard but noble way to grow). Third and last, we have seen that we grow also through pruning – spiritual discipline. Though sin is not praiseworthy – God's discipline, if received, can result in God's glory.

Application

There are many potential applications from today's sermon.

With planting and watering – try to live a "Plan A" lifestyle – simple obedience over time results in spiritual growth. Study the Bible and seek to apply it to your life. As often as you can – put yourself under the Word of God.

Regarding pruning – Let it be a warning - remember that God would prefer we grow spiritually by learning vicariously from the mistakes of others. But when you do mess up –

embrace God's discipline and learn from it. Parents – are you disciplining your children as you should – or are you tolerating sin in their lives? Church leaders – are we willing to rebuke when necessary? These all lead to spiritual growth.

As we wrap up, I want to come back to supporting people through the storms of life. I do believe this is an area where we need to improve. To do a better job caring for those going through difficulty. So my main challenge to you today – is that you would be a trellis to someone this week. Be a rung of support and encouragement. So think of someone in our church you know who is going through a hard time. I want you to commit to do something for them this week to encourage them and let them know it matters that they are a part of this church family.

As I was working on this part of the sermon – the Lord immediately brought a person to my mind, and I picked up my phone and called them to encourage them, and let them know I was praying for them. Just to let someone know they are not alone, and they are being prayed for can mean so much.

Plant and water – support and prune.

Let me end with this story:

Somewhere in Europe a group of tourists were visiting a picturesque village. In previous villages they were told of the great authors, playwrights, kings and scientists who come from those small villages.

One of the tourists walked by an old man sitting beside a fence. In a rather patronizing way, one tourist asked, "Were any great men born in this village?"

The old man replied, "Nope, only babies."

The foolish question brought a profoundly wise answer. There are no instant

heroes--whether in this world or in the kingdom of God. Growth takes time, being planted and watered by the Word – supported through suffering and pruned in discipline. Let's pray.