

“God’s Miracle Grow”



INTRO

In 1995 Chuck Bernhardt was the Comptroller at Northern Arizona University. He was reorganizing his area, and I, working in the human resources department, was assigned to help. He had some sticky personnel issues to deal with, reclassifying some position, adjustments of pay levels, and discipline issues. It was hard delicate work, but we got the job done. Bernhardt said, “Craig, do you like plants? I have a plant that I would like to give you as a token of my appreciation.” I was touched by his kindness, accepted and treasured the plant. *It was not a large plant* – only about a foot tall. *It was not an attractive plant* – kind of like a cross between a fern and a cactus. *It was not even a potted plant* – just roots swaying in a glass of water. But I treasured that little guy – I potted him and put him in my office.

Here is a picture of the plant. Do you see him? – There he is my trusted companion working beside me amid the piles of paper. *In fact, let’s call him Pete.* Pete the Plant In this picture he is about five years old. *Still not very big, still not very attractive.*

Well, you know I changed jobs and moved to a new office. Pete came with me. Here he is still small – Looking a little bit like a pitchfork.

You know some people made fun of my plant. But he came with me, in every office, year after year after year. Here is the last photo I have of Pete from years. They were giving me a going away party when I announced I was moving to Texas for seminary – and they threw confetti. Pete celebrated with me.

I did have one concern though – not that Pete was unattractive – that never bothered me. But that after seven years, Pete was still about a foot tall. He never grew. At least not much. He

didn't die, either! He just kind of stayed the same, year after year – a couple more leaves, maybe a new arm. That always bothered me, frankly, a little bit. Why wasn't Pete growing? Was I doing something wrong? Maybe it was because I would only water him about once a quarter? Should I be concerned?

I would like for you to think about Pete the Plant as we look at our subject this morning - *spiritual growth*. Because some of us are like Pete, in a way – we are nice people, good companions – but we really have not grown for some time. We have become satisfied with where we are at spiritually. And we need to be challenged to continue to grow. Others of you might be saying, “I do want to grow spiritually” but I don't know how.” Still others are afraid of change – the change that is required when we grow.

The title of today's sermon is *God's Miracle Grow* – Because God desires to help us to grow spiritually, just like plants - and kids and people - grow physically. An important way He does this is through His body – the church.

In this brief look at Spiritual Growth – We want to first propose a theological reason for growth. Second, we will look at one important way God causes growth in Christians and third, we will discuss what this means for us as a new church.

A Theological Reason for Growth.

Everyone knows that change is hard. Change means pain to some degree. Charles Kettering said, The World hates change, yet it is the only things that has brought progress.” Christians, too, I'm afraid, often hate change – even though it is quite necessary if we are to make any spiritual progress. Why seek the pain of change? What is the theological reason for spiritual growth?

Please turn to Romans 8:29: Paul says, “For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the Firstborn among many brethren. Romans 8:29”. In other words, we learn here and other places that it is God’s plan to change us and mold us and break us, if necessary so that we conform to the very image of Christ. This is our destination as a Christian.

Or to state it another way - *to the extent that we are not Christlike – we must grow. Therefore, spiritual growth is a theological necessity.* Started now, in this life, through a process that is called sanctification – the process of becoming holy – right in our behavior and right in our thinking. God works to conform us to the image of His son. Listen to Paul:

- Have this attitude in you which was also in Christ Jesus – Philippians 2:5
- I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in Me.

Galatians 2:20a.

We must grow – because our destination spiritually is to be like Jesus Christ. And we are not there yet.

Kids – Do you have any younger brothers or sisters who follow you around – want to talk like you, to act like you, to imitate you? And sometimes that is annoying? Well, the Bible says we are to be like Jesus Christ – to imitate Him – and it never annoys God for us to do that!

- Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ. 1 Cor 11:1
- Therefore be imitators of God as beloved children. Eph 5:1

All of this communicates a simple truth - That if *we are committed to becoming like Jesus Christ, we must equally be committed to growing.* We must not be satisfied with our current state of spiritual maturity. We have a high calling and a lofty destination.

Teaching as a Means of Spiritual Growth.

This leads now to our second point - How do we get from here to there – to the destination of Christlikeness – conformed to Jesus Christ?

Let's look at a familiar passage – turn with me to the great commission. Matthew 28:19-20. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, *teaching them to observe all that I commanded you...* (Matthew 28:19-20a). The focus of this passage is, of course, on making disciples. What are disciples? Students who seek to be like their teacher. Those desiring to be Christlike. Those who have signed on to change and to follow and to grow.

How does this happen? Look at the text - the students must be taught – “Teaching them to observe all that I commanded you.” In order to make disciples – children, youth, adults must be taught the commandments of Christ. This is our task and calling as a church. Paul said, “I planted, Apollos watered and God caused the growth.” God is cause of the growth, but we have our job to do as well – and a big job is to teach God's truth.

I found one particular assignment in seminary quite interesting. Dr. Bill Lawrence – had us future pastors go through the pastoral letters and identify the various roles of a pastor. I categorized the roles of a pastor into four broad categories. The first is “Leading the Sheep”. This would include being an elder, servant, role model to the church. I found 26 references to those types of activities. The second area was care for the sheep – to protect, encourage, to be a peacemaker and church discipline – I found 35 references to those kind of tasks. Third, there was a great deal of attention given to the pastor's own spiritual life – praying, personal devotions, suffering, maintaining a healthy marriage, etc. Again, about 35 references. The last category were duties that have to do with teaching – teaching, discipling, preaching, equipping, etc. 46

references - One of the primary duties of me as your pastor, and of us as a church is to teach God's word. Because when the truth is taught and the Holy Spirit applies that truth – lives are changed.

When you study the purpose of a church, you find teaching is everywhere. Let me give you just a few examples:

- Give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching. (1 Tim 4:13)
- An overseer...must be able to teach. (1 Tim 3:2)
- I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher (1 Tim 1:11)
- Entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. (2 Tim 2:2)
- All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching... (2 Time 3:16)
- Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior...teaching what is good. (Titus 2:3)

Application: Let's pause for application before we move to our third point – How can we apply this focus on teaching as it relates to spiritual growth? Three things – First – For everyone – Be teachable. Be open to learning new things – to be challenged in your beliefs – to consider new ideas – Have a teachable Spirit. Always ask, What is God teaching me through this sermon, this lesson, this life experience. In what areas does He want me to grow?

Second – Support our teachers – As we have nursery teachers, children's teachers – adult teachers – support these servants – We had three ladies spend the last four days at a conference in Minnesota – that we supported as a new church for them to go - so they could learn our new children's curriculum. Be sure to ask them how it went – We want to support teachers like that as a church – We need to support teachers personally through notes of encouragement.

For some – be a teacher – Not everyone is called to teach – but I know that you are. I know you that you have something to offer – Be open to teaching in whatever level God opens the door to – children, adults, youth. Be willing to share what God has done in your life.

Outcome of Growth

We have seen the theological reason for spiritual growth – that is because our destination is to be like Christ – and because we are not there yet, we must grow spiritually. We have looked at a means of growth – that is teaching in the church. Now finally, we end with some very practical outcomes of spiritual growth.

1) **The first outcome of spiritual growth is ministry growth.** Look at 2 Corinthians 10:15

The Corinthians, as you know, needed some spiritual growth. Paul's plan was as they grew in their faith, he would be freed up to take on larger ministry – and to preach the gospel beyond Corinth – even to Spain. Their spiritual growth would result in greater ministry. One preacher I heard said God can use a dull ax – but he can use a sharp ax more effectively. When I was growing up – my Dad planted a garden each year – and each year it got bigger. Us kids would help Him to plant and water the seeds. After we planted my Dad would always say the same thing – and have us kids say it – “Grow for me.”

Do you want to be used by God to impact your world tomorrow? God says, “Grow for me!”

2) **The second outcome of spiritual growth is preparation for heaven.** 2 Peter 3:18 says, “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” Why? Earlier Peter said, “The day of the Lord will come like a thief in which the heavens will pass away with a roar... because of this – you ought to live in holy conduct. You want to be prepared for heaven? For the return of the Lord? God says: Grow for Me!

3) The third outcome of spiritual growth is a life that brings glory to God. In regard to Abraham, Paul wrote: Rom. 4:20 yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God. Ah – here we are full circle – back to worship – Want to worship God well – to glorify Him – exalt him? When you are faced with challenge – God says, “Grow for Me!”

Conclusion

Like that Geico commercial – We had heard that everything is bigger in Texas. Big Tex at the State Fair. Big Hair. Big Property Taxes.

And you know what. When we moved – I brought Peter the Plant to Texas. My plant, Pete really likes Texas – I don’t have an office, here so I put Pete in the Kitchen. and he grew. He grew and grew and grew. He grew to be 5 feet seven inches tall. That is 3 inches taller than Tammy – in just four years! He has now hit the ceiling of our kitchen. I’m going to have to move Pete, but he has grown into the baker’s rack. He has exploded in growth!

My prayer for you is that your decision to join LCCC will be akin to my plant moving to Texas – that God would use this experience here as a dose of miracle grow in your own spiritual life – It may not be an easy road, but it will be a fulfilling one as together we grow toward Christlikeness. Resulting in expanded ministry, preparation for heaven and glory to God.

I have one more point of application for you If I could have a couple ushers - I would like each family to take one of these plants – and to care for it – repot it – name him – or her, if you like. watch it grow and may it be an object lesson for you, as Pete was for me – That God desires to help us to grow spiritually, and for the church, this is a critical purpose.