

“Get Up and Grow”

What’s the Point? part #4

Philippians 2:12-18

[53] Welcome. I am so glad that you decided to worship with us in God’s house together. Would you please pray with me?

Lord, if you have something to tell me, I’m ready to listen. Search me and know me, God. Look into my heart and see where I need to change. Help me live in your eternal way. In Jesus’ name, we pray, amen.

[54] Today I brought my dragon tree. I’ve had it since college – a gift from my friend, Jan. Dragon trees are tough and can survive many days without care, but if I want mine to look good and thrive, I have to help it regularly. I admit, my tree has been a little neglected from time to time. Plants neither grow nor stay green if they don’t get any water. Or sunshine. Or some plant food. I used to pretend with my children that the plants were slurping when we watered them.

[55] Growth is a natural part of life. Take babies, for instance. I just baptized Holly Kelley at the park two week ago. Babies are cute, but how cute would it be if they never grew up? The same principle holds true of our faith. What would it look like if we never grew, if we never fed ourselves or challenged ourselves? (Would it look like this video?)

[56] *BlueFishTV “Is Your Faith in Kindergarden?”*

[57] I think we all agree that would be weird. God has created us to have a loving relationship with him. We don’t want that relationship to be static. We don’t want to remain in spiritual kindergarden. We want to grow! We want our faith to be alive. That’s what we are discovering: we can grow in our relationship with God, deepen our faith, and see how God blesses our other relationships, too.

[58] In the last three weeks, we’ve talked about honoring God with your life, being created to worship God, and connecting with other Christians. Each action is part of our God-given purpose for life. Today I want to talk about a third truth. You were created to become like Christ. The churchy word for this is “discipleship.”

[59] You were created to become like Christ. Note I did not say, you were created to be the Christ. Do you remember the two universal truths? #1 – There

is a God. #2 – You are not God. Do not go around telling anyone this week, “Pastor says I’m supposed to walk on water and raise the dead!” No, you are not created to be the Christ. You are not a god. That temptation is as old as humanity itself. The snake tempted Adam and Eve into thinking they could “become like God.” (See Genesis 3:5). It’s simply not true. You were not created to be the Christ. You were created to become like Christ. Those little words make a big difference.

Becoming like Christ also does not mean you are supposed to superficially look like Christ. You can go and buy a Halloween costume if that’s your goal. Superficially looking like Christ is easy; just grow a beard, put on sandals and wear a robe. (Ladies: don’t try this at home!) Becoming like Christ, on the other hand, is much harder, and much better.

[60] How do we become like Christ? Paul spells it out for us in Philippians 2:5: “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.” In other words, becoming like Christ means taking on Christ’s character, not his divinity or his clothing.

At this point, someone is probably wondering, “What was Christ’s character like?” [Pause.] I’m glad you asked, because Paul illuminates that for us in our scripture for today. Let’s look again at Philippians 2:1-18.

Philippians is it is a joyful letter written as a missionary’s thank you note. In the midst of his thank you, Paul encourages the Philippians to become like Christ. Paul describes Jesus as a model of humility and obedience. Christ did not take advantage of his divinity, but rather, served others unconditionally.

[61] And then we come to verse 12, which starts with the word “therefore.” Whenever you read “therefore” in the bible, you have to ask yourself what it’s “there for.” Because the therefore is THERE FOR a reason.

It’s like Paul is giving us his “so what.” So, Christ was humble and obedient. So what? So, we should be too. Specifically, Paul says in verse 12 to “Therefore... continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.”

This is a big deal. “Work out your own salvation.” If we were created to become like Christ, then we need to take responsibility for our own spiritual growth. Unlike my poor dragon tree, I can feed myself. As it says in Matthew 5:6, “Blessed are those with hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be

filled." I'm asking you today, who's hungry? (I am, but coffee hour isn't quite ready yet.)

[62] Becoming like Christ involves a few "Do's" and "Do not's" Let me start with three Do Not's. First: Do not try to earn your own salvation. Although Paul uses the word "work," he is not promoting a "works theology." That's the idea that if you do enough "good things," you'll get into heaven. No! Paul says in Ephesians 2:8-9, "It is by grace that you have been saved, through faith...not by works." Salvation is a free gift of God. That is a foundational truth of discipleship. Do not think you can earn your salvation. You can't.

[63] Second: Do not expect someone else to make the decision for you to grow spiritually. Only you get to choose whether or not to grow your in faith. The choice to become like Christ is yours. As a practical example, take communion. Symbolically, we all receive the body and blood of Christ, internalizing his ministry. However, no one can eat the bread and drink the cup for you. That must be your choice. So do not expect someone else to be responsible for your decision to grow in faith in Christ.

[64] Third: Do not complain. Paul literally says this in verse 14. "Do everything without complaining or arguing..." (BSB) My mom used to say it was the 11th Commandment. "Thou shalt not complain." Actually, we would expand it to: "Thou shalt not complainth about thy mother's cooking, lest ye cooketh the next meal." Seriously, do not complain that becoming like Christ is too hard. It is hard, because all things worthwhile are. The foolishness of this world says "Avoid hard things; it's easier to just complain than to act." However, that's not the way of the gospel: Jesus chose the cross and never complained. Paul was imprisoned and never complained.

This was a hard rule even for Jesus' original disciples. When Jesus taught, in John 6:43-69, that his disciples must "eat his body and drink his blood," (which we take today as a reference to communion), guess what? Those disciples grumbled, and many of them quit following Jesus. Just like that, because it got hard. And you know what else? Twelve disciples remained. Peter remained. He said, "Where else will we go? Jesus, you have the words of eternal life!" (John 6:68)

I want to be the disciple that stays at all costs, even when it gets hard. Even when I fail. Jesus didn't complain. Peter didn't complain. Paul didn't complain.

What right do we have, then? None at all. Do not complain. Instead, work out your salvation with fear and trembling. No one ever said being a disciple was easy, but it is worth it.

[65] Enough with the Do Not's. Let's focus on some Do's. The first do is this: Shine. Like the song by the Newsboys: (*sing*) “Shine, make ‘em wonder what you’ve got. Make ‘em wish that they were not, on the outside looking bored. Shine, let it shine before all men, let ‘em see good works and then, let ‘em glorify the Lord.”

Paul says we are meant to shine like stars in the universe. (v.15) Disciples of Christ should have a natural shine about them. 2nd Corinthians 2:15 says we are the aroma of Christ to those around us. To the rest of the world, true disciples smell a little funky. The truth is, when we commit to worshipping God, connecting to the Church, and transforming our attitudes to become like Christ, the world finds it odd. We shine, and the difference is noticeable. The saying goes, “I’d rather see a sermon than hear one.” So go out and shine.

[66] The second “Do” is this: Do stay close to God, specifically, by prayer and reading God’s Word regularly. It’s awfully hard to be obedient to Christ if we don’t actually know what he said. Spoiler alert: becoming like Christ means we have to read the Bible. In it, we find the words of life. Read it to stay close to Christ and be his disciple.

[67] Third, do stay close to God’s people. When you stay close to other disciples, working towards the same goal, you find strength. You find it’s easier to rejoice when you are around joyful people. You find it’s easier to pray when you’re around prayerful people. You find it’s hard to stay down when everyone around you is lifting you up. The beauty of the church is, while we all make this decision individually, we’re all in this together.

Shine for Christ. Stay close to God, God’s Word, and God’s people. Finally, (I stole this one from Nike) “Just do it.” Learn to feed yourself, and start today.

[68] There is a story about a man in the hospital with an infection. It was a serious illness, but treatable. All the man had to do was take some penicillin. But he refused. His doctor pleaded with him, the nurses pleaded with him, his family begged him, “Take this medicine!” But the man, for whatever reason, just said, “No, I won’t take it.” You know, every member of his family would have gladly

taken the drugs on his behalf, but they couldn't. It was his body. It was his choice. There came a time, as the man grew weaker, that he regretted his decision and wished he could take the pills. But by then, it was too late.

[69] If that's you, please don't wait any longer. We only get one life to live, one life to honor God and become like his Son. One life to experience the greatest love relationship this world has ever known. One life to receive Christ. Do it now. If this is the first time you've ever heard this, or the 50th time, make that commitment to follow Christ and grow. Take that chance, receive Christ, let the Holy Spirit fill your life. Make your own personal commitment to grow, and let those around you help.

You were created to become like Christ. Take responsibility for your spiritual growth. GROW. SHINE. Just do it. Christ is calling you. Don't settle for the crumbs of fake discipleship; start eating the real spiritual food. Get hungry, get thirsty, because Jesus promises, he will fill you up.

Memory verse:

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” Matthew 5:6

Reflection questions:

1. What fills your thirst for righteousness? Bible study? Music? Something else?
2. Think of someone whose faith makes them “shine like stars.” (Phil. 2:15) In what ways do they shine?
3. What aspect of Christ's character do you most admire?
4. In what way can you commit to growing more like Jesus?

Based on Rick Warren's “The Purpose-Drive Life”, 2002, with Doug Fields Youth Ministry resources.