

Do You Need to Grow Spiritually? (Part 2)

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- [0 : 0 0] Thank you, Richard. Good job. You know that everything that has life in it grows. It just happens.
- Plants, animals, and people. If we see something, anything, that doesn't grow, and by that I mean changes, matures, if we see that something never does that, we know that something's wrong.
- It's diseased or even dead. Well, Christian growth, change, becoming mature. That's a normal expression of the Christian life.
- We don't just stay the same. And Paul shows us in Philippians 3 that really the closer you get to the Lord, the more you know Him and love Him and walk with Him through life, the more you get close to Him, the more you become aware of your own sinfulness, your own need to grow and mature and change.
- I want you to look at the same passage we looked at last week, how he describes his desire to keep on growing spiritually, specifically in verses 12 through 14.
- [1 : 1 9] Let's look at it. Philippians 3, beginning in verse 12. Not that I have already obtained this, or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me His own.
- Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. Look at it. He's emphasizing this twice. Paul is the, you know, he's sort of a rock star of the early church.
- I mean, he is the brilliant theologian, the evangelist, the church planter. But he wants everybody to understand, repeating it, 12 and 13.
- I've not arrived. I'm not where I need to be. I know that. And he's just driving that point home. And if Paul knows that about himself, so should we.
- Verse 13. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own, but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead.
- [2 : 3 1] I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. We're using Paul, his testimony here, to help us see how vital it is that we put forth the effort to cooperate with God as He works in us to enable us to grow spiritually.
- Let's start by reviewing some of what we looked at last week, but we're also going to add to this point number one. Look at it. The way to know if you need to grow spiritually.
- Paul tells us how he knew that he had not arrived, that he still needed to grow spiritually. First, he'd not met his spiritual goals.
- That's what he's talking about in verse 12, that phrase, not that I've already obtained this. We saw last week that he was, the this is referring to what he said in verses 10 and 11.
- He's not attained or achieved those goals. Now, if you look at verses 10 and 11, Jesus is the focal point of each one of his goals, but he really describes his number one desire, number one goal is to know Christ.
- [3 : 4 6] Look at it, verse 10, that I may know Him. That's the foundation. And we know that's the foundation because that is a shorthand version of what he just said two verses prior.

Look in verse eight. This goal is the absolute most important thing in his life. He says, Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

Everything he counted as a loss, those were his credentials in his world as a Pharisee leader, one of the leading teachers of the Jewish people.

I mean, Paul had a very impressive resume as a Jewish rabbi. But when God opened his eyes to the truth about who Jesus was, he put his trust in Jesus.

He was born again. Everything changed. And all that was impressive for a Jewish leader in that day, he said, it's just like, I'm ready to flush it.

[5 : 02] It's like dung, we said last week. It means nothing now that I have come or in the process of knowing Christ. Now, knowing Christ means more than just knowing some things about him.

But that's important. You've probably heard somebody say, read, well, we emphasize, or don't go too far in this, in our relationship with the Lord, and just emphasize head knowledge, factual information.

Well, we need to know factual information is very important. You've got to know who it is that Jesus is in order for him to save you, to come to him, to warn him to save you.

We need to know facts. Jesus is the son of God who left the glory of heaven and came into this world to ultimately go to a cross and die for our sins.

That's the information that we need to know. That's the Jesus that we need to put our faith and trust and have confidence in. But, knowing Christ means more than, far more than, just knowing about him.

[6 : 12] Knowing Christ means knowing him personally by experience. We're talking about a relationship. Paul described how Jesus had initiated their relationship that we looked at in a little more detail last week at the latter part of verse 12.

Christ Jesus has made me his own. You have a relationship with the Lord Jesus this morning if you have one because he called you to himself.

You responded in faith, but he initiated, he called you. He opened your eyes to see the truth about who he is and your need for salvation and he called you to that faith that you have in him now as your Lord and Savior.

Well, ever since then, Paul has been growing in his relationship with Christ. He's been getting to know Jesus better. And as he gets to know him better, he loves him more.

And as he knows and loves Jesus who gave his life for him, he wants to give his life in service to the Lord. That's a part of what's involved in knowing Christ.

[7 : 18] But think of this, as he gets to know, has this relationship with the Lord Jesus, he experiences the Lord's presence in his life, the Lord's love, the Lord's affirmation.

That's what, that's a major part of every Christian's relationship with the Lord. We get to know him, we love him, we want to serve him, we experience his presence, his power, his love in our lives.

Just like every relationship that you have right now, from your marriage to your children to your parents to good friends, you get to know a person, you get involved with them, but they also get involved with you.

There's give and take in every healthy, good relationship. That's the case in our relationship with the Lord. Now as Paul writes this, Bible scholars tell us that it's probably been 30 years since his conversion.

Paul began his relationship with the Lord 30 years prior to writing this. But that relationship has not grown stale. It's not boring.

[8 : 37] Knowing Christ is still his number one priority. Now the second reason Paul gives for why he needs to grow, look at this, he was not perfect. He says, not that I've already obtained this or am already perfect.

And we looked at that in a little bit more detail last week as well. All I want us to see here is the Apostle Paul, most mature Christian that we could ever imagine.

He knew that he was not perfect. He knew that there was still sin in his life that he needed to overcome. He needed to learn, he needed to do a better job of battling some temptations.

He needed to become more like Jesus, which is God's goal for us. We'll look at it in a moment. What Paul said about himself, I've not arrived.

I'm not perfect. Well, that's true about us. And I stressed last week that we know that. Everyone here knows I've not arrived.

[9 : 41] I'm not perfect as a Christian or in any way. But here's the question that we need to really think about. What matters the most?

Do you care that you're not perfect? Do you care as a Christian that there's still sin in your life that's whipping you some days?

There's still temptations that just sometimes it just seems to overwhelm you. And you say that, you do that. Does it bother you?

And then, do you have a desire to overcome those things? Do you have a desire to grow spiritually? I want to think about it in two ways.

First, do you desire to know Jesus better and have, actually enjoy a closer relationship with Him? I mean, all of us in this room, we have all kinds of desires.

[10 : 50] You have desires about relationships with people. You have desires about, you know, having enough income to provide for yourself. You have desires for, you know, lots of things that are good, normal.

If, before we looked at this passage this morning or even last week, if you were given a sheet of paper just out of the blue and somebody told you, I want you to write down the desires of your heart, beginning with your greatest desire and just however many you want to put on the paper, would you put on that paper, honestly, I have a true heartfelt desire to know the Lord better, to be closer to Him, for my relationship to be richer, deeper.

Well, if you have that desire and you're not spending time with the Lord on a regular basis, I want to ask you right now, make spending time with Jesus a priority beginning today.

And I want you to think about this very specifically. If you're not already spending time with the Lord every day, start and just start with 15 minutes. find 15 minutes, you can make like an appointment with Him and spend time in prayer, talking to Him and reading the Bible.

As you pray, praise the Lord for who He is. Thank Him for how He has been and He is working in your life.

[12 : 39] I mean, really focus on praising Jesus and your Heavenly Father. Thank Him. both the Father and the Son. Ask Him to help you to have a greater desire to know Him.

Ask Him to help you to truly draw closer to Him and really enjoy a relationship with Him. Start reading the Bible and don't just read randomly.

Read a book of the New Testament. let's just say pick Matthew, whatever book you want to. Pick Philippians if you're not reading it. And don't try to see how much you can read.

Just read a paragraph at a time. Based on the time you have available, take a paragraph and read it. Think about what the human author is saying and what God is saying through that human author.

As you read it or after you've read it and you're thinking about it, ask God to help you to understand what He wants you to understand about that. Ask Him to help you to believe what He's saying.

[13 : 55] Ask Him to help you obey it and then ask Him to help you to share it. Now if you pick a passage, you read a paragraph, you think, I don't have a clue what He's talking about.

Go to the next one. Go to the next paragraph. Don't get bogged down. Nobody understands every paragraph in the Bible. If you say you do, you're a liar.

You need to confess the sin of lying and arrogance if you think you know everything about the Bible. Nobody does. Don't be intimidated. But there is much in the Bible.

Many, many, many paragraphs that God will help us to clearly understand and then it becomes a question if we're going to believe it and obey it and even think about sharing it.

Lisa and I are going to celebrate our 43rd wedding anniversary, the 27th of this month. When you put in the year that I knew her before we got married, we have known each other for 44 years.

[15 : 05] I just can't believe that. The time has gone on like that. Well, we are both looking forward to retiring together this summer and having more time just with one another.

We really are. Now, we may need marriage counseling by Christmas. That may be true. And I'm going to really get concerned if I come home and she's playing Ronnie Millsaps, this could be our last good night together.

But I'm going to take a chance. We're going to take a chance. We're excited about the thought of spending more time together without other responsibilities.

Isn't that the way it should be in a healthy relationship? If you've got a healthy marriage, you want to spend time together. Certainly, you have things you do on your own.

That's healthy too. Nobody needs to be together 24-7, that kind of thing all the time. But if you have a healthy relationship, really with people, a real relationship, you do want to spend time with them, share some of your life with them.

[16 : 28] And the closer you are, the more of your life you want to share with them. It's just normal and it's healthy. Well, that should be true in our relationship with the Lord.

If it's healthy and if it's growing. Second thought, do you desire to be perfect? Now, we are not going to achieve it in this world.

We all know that, should know that. We don't emphasize this enough. I don't emphasize it enough. Perfection is our goal.

We are to seek to be perfect as our Lord is perfect. That is the goal that we're not going to meet in this world.

But it's God's goal for us. Becoming like Jesus. Look at this. From the time God saves us, regenerates us. Look at this. For those he before knew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son.

[17 : 35] I've said it many times and we need to understand. God has a purpose for each of us. It encompasses a lot of things. But in terms of just who we are, our character, God's purpose is that we become over a lifetime more and more like Jesus.

And we're never going to achieve that this side of heaven, but it should always be our goal, our prayer. It should be our goal and our prayer for ourselves and for other people in our lives that we really care about.

I mean, you think about those who are closest to you that you pray for on a regular basis. What all do you pray about? Well, probably all kinds of things. But on your prayer list for your children, your grandchildren, for your parents, for your close friends, people that you really are close to and you care about and you want to pray for them, do you pray that they will grow in Christian maturity, in becoming more like Jesus, in becoming perfect?

Paul did. He prayed this kind of prayer for his friends in this church at Philippi that we're reading about that we saw a while back, Philippians chapter one. Look at this. He said, and it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment so that you may approve what is excellent and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

I want you to think, when he's praying for them to be pure and blameless for the day of Christ when Jesus returns, he's praying for their, what the theologians would call sanctification, their growth in developing Christ-like character so that they will be pure and blameless and if you're blameless, you're perfect.

[19 : 41] That's the goal. That's how Paul is praying. That's how we need to think and pray and needs to be our goal. Some of you set very high goals for yourself.

Some of you have some very definite financial goals probably at certain stages of life. Some of you have very high career goals, definite goals that are work-related.

Some of you have retirement goals or home-related goals. That's good. Very helpful. Younger people in this room, you may have a goal to play a sport in college and along with you, your parents have a goal for you to win a scholarship in that sport or academics or however you can to help pay for college.

Some of you have a goal. You want to graduate with honors. Maybe even be at the top of your class. Some of you have a goal.

I just want to graduate. I want to be in the class. But it's a goal. Work for it. We need to learn to set challenging goals for ourselves in this spiritual realm.

[21 : 03] To grow in our relationship with our Lord Jesus. To love Him to the point that we're willing to serve Him. not just serve ourselves but serve Him and serve Him even sacrificially at times.

Like Paul's praying there, we need to make it a goal that we be more like Him in loving others, in pleasing God, and in developing this pure and blameless character.

If you want to grow spiritually, first of all, recognize that you've got a long way to go. You've not arrived, not even close.

But then we've got a desire to grow. And we're going to see in a moment we've got to put forth effort to grow. But before we get to that, I want to make a very strong statement.

If we really want to grow, we will. Because God will enable us. God wants us to.

[22 : 07] And God will never give up on us. Look at this. We saw this a long time ago. In fact, we actually began the study of Philippians with this verse. Paul writes, and I'm sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion in the day of Christ Jesus.

If God has saved you, he is never going to give up on you. He's always going to be working in you through the good times and bad. Maybe disciplining you a lot of times to develop Christlike character in you.

One of the ways God brings his work to completion is by giving us the desires and the ability to please him as we've looked at several times. Philippians 2.13, it is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Here's where we're going to look next. God gives us desires He will give us the ability to succeed but we've got to put forth effort. We've got to cooperate with Him as He works in us to mature us and develop us into the image of Jesus.

Second thing we look at, the way to respond when you discover that you need to grow spiritually. Verses 12-14, Paul describes the pursuit of knowing Christ better, becoming more like Him in terms of a track athlete running a race.

[23 : 21] The Olympics are soon, think in terms of an Olympic runner. For an Olympic runner to be successful, there's several things he or she's got to do. First, let's think about it personally.

We've got to put forth great effort. You've got to push yourselves. Look at what Paul says in these verses. I press on to make Him my own. Straining forward to what lies ahead.

I press on toward the goal for the prize. Christian living requires effort on our part. God gives us the desire. He gives us the ability.

But we've got to exert ourselves. We've got to put forth great effort, training, disciplining ourselves, learning to resist temptation, learning to spend time with the Lord, learning to act on what we know.

We've got to put forth effort. Secondly, we've got to focus on the goal that is before us, which we've seen is to know Christ and become perfect like Him. But look at the second part of these phrases we just looked at.

[24 : 26] I press on to make it my own. Straining forward to what lies ahead. I press on toward the goal for the prize.

We'll look at that in more detail a little bit later. We've got to put forth effort. You are never going to just drift into becoming a more material Christian.

You'll drift backward but you'll never drift forward. You have got to press on, put forth effort. You've got to focus on the goal before us.

I want to become more like Jesus. I want to develop Christ-like character. And number three, we must not look back. He says, forgetting what lies behind. Now, this obviously means you don't forget everything in your life that's behind you.

We can't do that. We shouldn't do that. There's a lot of things God wants us to remember and let it motivate us. For an example, in the Old Testament, God repeatedly calls the people of Israel, His chosen people, remember what I've done for you.

[25 : 36] Remember how I delivered you from slavery in Egypt. Remember how I just sent you into the promised land and gave you that land. Remember things I've done in your life.

And we need to do the same thing. Never forget how God has worked in your life and let it be a motivation that He's your Heavenly Father. He's always with you. He is for you.

You can trust Him. You can count on Him. Paul's idea of forgetting the past I think is, we can think about it in two ways. Don't allow the past to interfere in what you're doing now.

Don't allow your past, good or bad, interfere in what is going on or should be going on now. You see, some people do that by dwelling on their past failures and sins.

All of us in this room, we have done things in the past that causes us shame, embarrassment, regret, and guilt. You might think to yourself, if people in here knew some of the things I have thought, said, and done, you know, it'd just blow them away.

[26 : 51] Well, just about everybody in this room could say that. There is no one in this room that has not done things that are shameful, humiliating, ungodly, offensive to God and other people.

Now, if you have not confessed those things and sought God's forgiveness, turned from them, well, you do need to do that before you can move on.

The verse of Scripture that should be one of the most comforting verses to every Christian is 1 John 1, 9, if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

No matter what it is that brings you great shame and humiliation, no matter what it is that so offended God, if you have truly, sincerely admitted that to God, turned from it, sought His forgiveness.

You need to understand, take Him at His word. God forgave you. God wiped the slate clean. He'll never bring it up to you again.

[28 : 15] I heard an assistant principal say one time, who was in charge of discipline at the high school level, when He had to suspend someone, He told them, now when you come back after your three days, you got a clean slate.

We're going to forget what you've done. We're not going to hold it against you. When you come back, you have a fresh start and don't come back and worry about it.

that's what God gives us, a fresh start. And if you are the one who's been sinned against and someone has sought your forgiveness and you say, I have forgiven you, then you've got to wipe the slate clean and give them a fresh start and never throw it back up in their face.

It's impossible to forgive and forget. What that means, though, is you forgive and not that it's gone from your mind.

It means you never bring it up to somebody again. If you've truly forgiven somebody in your life, don't bring it up. Don't remind them.

[29 : 44] Forget it. Lay it aside. Remember it no more just as God does and give them a fresh start. Now, some people allow their past failures and sins to ever keep them from going forward.

But on the other hand, there are some people who allow their past successes and accomplishments to interfere in what they're doing now. you may have read the Bible from cover to cover last year, but that's not helping you in your relationship with the Lord right now.

You may have had the most consistent devotional life you've ever had in your life the last six months. That was good. But you need to continue to meet with the Lord and walk with the Lord and seek to be faithful to Him.

If we want to enjoy a close fellowship with the Lord as a normal part of our lives, we've got to stay close to Him. It's a day-by-day kind of closeness.

You know, some Christians reach a point in life where they think if they've served God in the past, they've done enough. And I don't know, some of you probably said this, I don't know, I cannot remember somebody saying this to me, so I'm not, I'm not, I'm not jumping on you, but if the shoe fits, wear it.

[31 : 14] I'm not going to apologize for it. But I've heard people say, well, I did my time working with children when my children were young. I've done my time doing this, and I'm not going to do it anymore.

I've done so forth, and I'm just going to do nothing, basically, now. We cannot do that. That will make our relationship with the Lord stale.

That will take all the fire, the joy, the enthusiasm out of life. We cannot ever reach the point where we just say, I'm going to quit, I've done my part, done my time, because from now on, I just don't want to be involved.

You know, I'm going to retire as a full-time pastor this summer. But I want to make some things very clear about that. I am not retiring from my relationship with the Lord or my service to Him.

One of the things that I am looking forward to in retirement is having more time to spend with the Lord in things like prayer and Bible study and just reading without having to prepare sermons and Bible studies.

[32 : 45] I'm looking forward to that. Just having the joy of spending time with the Lord and not trying to put it in a form to communicate it to others like this.

I love doing it. But I also look forward to some time where there's no deadline to prepare a presentation, a sermon, a Bible study.

I have talked to people, I've heard people say, someone just very recently, who is a man who is retired, what I just said, one guy has worked hard all of his life, always been very busy, and actually three people, bits and pieces of conversations, they have told me I enjoy getting up in the morning, eating breakfast, drinking coffee, and having no kind of deadline, and maybe spending two or three hours just reading the Bible, thinking about the things of God, praying, reading other things, and just enjoying fellowship with the Lord.

I'm looking forward to that. I want to do that. Now, I do plan on continuing to preach as the Lord gives me opportunity.

I love to do this. I think God called me to this. I don't plan to ever quit as long as I'm able, got the mind, and I don't smart aleck say, well, you need to already quit. You know, I know the mind's leaving.

[34 : 15] I do plan to preach. I also plan to develop a website at some point, put sermons and Bible studies online, sort of give me an outlet for studies.

I do want to be productive, not just me and God, but I want to have, you know, do something productive to help other people. Also, maybe some commentaries on current events that will probably get my website shut down within two weeks, but that's okay.

I'll put forth the effort. What I'm trying to say is we can't ever retire from serving the Lord. The way we serve Him will change at various times in our life, not just at retirement, but I want you to think right now, if you're a Christian, God has given you gifts, talents, and abilities that He wants you to use for His glory and other people's good.

You have that responsibility if you're a Christian. You can do that in a lot of different ways, but one of the ways as a member of this church is you need to be serving the Lord in and through this church.

We need, we're, we're, Christians are referred to as the body of Christ. We need all the body parts to work, to be involved, to be the church that God calls us to be, to be the healthy, effective, productive church the Lord calls us to be.

[35 : 40] But let's look at one thing real quickly. One last thing. He says, I've always been looking forward. He says, straining forward to what lies ahead. You know, I've, I've never run track.

I've played a lot of different things, but never ran track. But I'm, I'm told that when you're running track, just like a baseball player running the baseline, you don't look back over your shoulder. You don't look back to see how far the next guy is or what's going on.

You look at the crowd. You stay focused on your goal. And the closer you get to the finish line, the Olympic runner, the sprinter, even the long distance runner, they're out front, they want to win, they stretch way out for their chest to break the line, break the line, whatever it is that's going to be the finish line so they can win.

Paul says, straining forward to what lies ahead. Paul described what he is training, what he is straining forward to that lies ahead in verse 14.

He says, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. He's talking about his heavenly reward that awaits him at the end of his life.

[36 : 48] Here's how I want us to close. We're all going to face the end of our life one day and we don't know when it will be. Everybody doesn't live to be old. And when the end of life comes for you, we're going to appear before the judgment seat of the Lord.

All of us. Look at what Paul says in 2 Corinthians. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body with a good or evil.

When you look at that verse and think about it, what comes to your mind? Is it fear or terror? Terror? Uncertainty? Or do you, as you think about that, is there confidence?

Even a sense of joy because you're thinking about reward? I want you to look at how Paul faced that day.

It's described in 2 Timothy 3. He says this, the time of my departure has come. He knows he's going to be executed. It's right at hand. He's going to die.

[38 : 01] He says, I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day and not only to me, but also to all who have loved his appearing.

The key to ending life this way is to live our lives in close personal fellowship with the Lord.

Do you have that? Do you want it if you don't? If that is your desire of your heart, but you know you don't have a relationship with the Lord, admit that to him. Confess your sin.

Turn from your sin. Trust Jesus as your savior. Call upon him to save you. You can begin that kind of relationship now. If you say, I know I am a Christian, no doubt I am trusting Christ and him alone.

I have had a close relationship with him, but it's not like it used to be. It's not growing. It's not maturing right now. Well, if that's the case, I want to encourage you to make Jesus spending time with him.

[39 : 16] Getting to know him better, your number one priority. Spend time with him every day. And by God's grace, you will grow. Look at this again, one more time.

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. You can grow. But you've got to do it God's way. You've got to cooperate with him.

You've got to spend time with him. And final thought, if you do have a growing relationship with the Lord, don't ever let it get old or be stale.

Follow Paul's example. But one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Let's pray together. Dear God, help all of us in this room right now to admit to you and ourselves whether or not we desire growth, spiritual maturity, become more like Jesus.

[40 : 36] Know him better and love him more. And Father, with that truth about what we really desire, show us how to respond.

And dear God, overwhelm us with the desire and the ability to respond in the way that will please you.

And in an attitude of prayer, you just talk to the Lord, listen to the Lord, and respond to him the way he's speaking to you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Hello? Thank you. Thank you.