

Message Transcript

PREPARE TO GROW | WE STAND FIRM

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Hey, before we get started today across all of our locations, what we want to do is we want to recognize and honor and encourage a very, very special group of people. By now I think just about all of us are probably back to school. I don't know how you feel about that, whether you are excited about that or kind of bemoaning that.

If you are a school worker, like in any way, shape, or form so that means school teachers, faculty members, administrators, school bus drivers, food preparer, or home educator, I think I've covered it all, would you stand to your feet across all of our locations. Would you just stand to your feet right now? Stay standing. We want to acknowledge you and encourage you today.

Can I just speak to you for just a moment? Stay standing to your feet. I know you probably hate having people give you recognition, but what we want to do is we want to encourage you. And right now can I just say this? You play a vitally important role in our community and you pour into and invest into the lives of the next generation, in the classroom, in the hallways, and outside the classrooms. It's not an easy job, whether in a public or private school or home educator. You have a thankless job. You are underpaid. Can I get an Amen?

And honestly, oftentimes when you hear from people it's because they are upset and sometimes I can kind of relate to that. So, I just want you to know, man, we just want to bless you and encourage you and pray a prayer over you as you launch into a brand-new school year.

So, it's kind of our tradition around here. If you are sitting near somebody standing would you extend a hand in their direction? Don't touch them. That's weird. Just extend a hand in their direction and this is us supporting and praying over them. Let's pray together.

Father, these men and women who are standing to their feet, we are so, so grateful for who they are and the role that they have chosen as they choose to invest into the next generation in the classroom and in the hallways, whether it's administration or in a support role.



God, we are so thankful for them. They play a vital role in discipling the next generation. And many of them do not have an easy job, whether that's in an environment or maybe it's discouraged how they talk about their faith, maybe they are in a private school setting but there are all kinds of different individuals who are in that school system—home education and all of the challenges that come with that.

Father, I just pray that You would fill their cup. I pray that they would not be running on fumes but that You would be with them. That You would extend encouragement their way. We want to bless them and lift them up and pray for Your anointing on them as they venture into this school year. That You would equip them and give them what they need to pour into and invest into the lives of each student and their families. What they do is incredibly important and we acknowledge that today. And we ask this in Jesus' name. And everybody said: Amen, Amen, and Amen.

Come on. Give it up for them one more time.

Hey, if you stood to your feet as a school worker, do not leave your campus today... We have a gift for you and part of that gift is a \$75 gift card. You just use that to clear your list, buy supplies, whatever you need to equip you to do your job. Just receive that as a gift from us to you. We just want to be as generous as we can because we have a very generous church and we want to be generous with you. Your campus pastor will give you instructions on how to get that gift before you leave today.

If you have a Bible head over to 1 Peter. 1 Peter, chapter 1 is where we are going to be together today.

About eight years ago when we moved into our house, surveyors told us that a portion of our backyard is in what they called a flood plain. And sure enough, two times a year after a heavy rain that part of the backyard will flood. And part of the reason is because there is a natural spring inside the ground and it would kind of bubble up and it would add to the flooding.

We heard that trees that drink enough water are Weeping Willows. So, we thought, "Well, let's plant a couple of Weeping Willows right there on the flood plain and maybe that will help dissipate some of the water. And it has certainly helped. And here, six or seven years later I want to show you a picture of our willow trees that are in our backyard. It's kind of a view that I have every morning from outside of our kitchen window with my cup of coffee.



And what I want you to notice is that the tree on the right is a little bit bigger. Actually, when we planted them, it was a little bit smaller than the one on the left. But the tree on the right is actually growing faster than the tree on the left.

In fact, if you were to take this picture from the north looking south, if you were to go around to the other side and look north, you'd see that that smaller tree is not looking so good from the back. It's got a big old bald spot, a couple of brown branches. I'm not quite sure if it's going to make it.

And the thing is that the reason why the tree on the right, I think, is growing as effectively as it is is because it's the closest one to the natural spring. So, that spring kind of bubbles up and the water kind of flows into the pond and it hits that tree first. And that tree, honestly, is drinking up more than its fair share of water. And it's growing more effectively than the other.

Now, what's true for weeping willows is true for us as human beings, spiritually speaking. You and I were made to grow. But growth doesn't just happen by chance. You don't manufacture the growth. Here's what you do when it comes to growth, you've got to put yourself in the right position to grow.

Now, last week, if you missed it, we kicked off a nine-week series where we are just going verse by verse through this short, powerful little letter in the New Testament called 1 Peter.

And what Peter is doing is he writing to encourage first generation Christians who were struggling in their faith to grow so that they could stand firm in the midst of a very hostile world.

So, last week we left off in verse 12. Today we're going to pick it up in verse 13 and we're going to go through chapter 2, verse 3. Here's where we are going. From this text I want to talk to you about the importance of spiritual growth—why you should grow.

Actually, I want to get a little bit more specific than that term, because you may not know what I mean by spiritual growth. I'm not talking about the unawareness of spiritual things. I'm talking about this: maturity in Christ. That's what I mean. Mainly what that is, how we get it, why is it important, and how we put ourselves in position for it?



Jesus one time would describe Himself and us this way in the gospels. He would say, "I am the vine, you are the branch. Don't confuse the roles. You are not the vine. I'm the vine. The vine is the source. The vine is the source of nutrients. Don't try to do vine things. You are a branch. Be a branch. What does a branch do? A branch just stays connected to the vine. You put yourself in a position to grow. And it's important to understand a couple of terms before we can kind of get into the meat of the text because I don't want to assume that you know everything that I am talking about.

One of the things that I love about our church is that we have people all over the map in their journey with Jesus. We have people who don't yet know Jesus who maybe are just kind of new to faith, checking things out.

And we have people who are brand-new in their faith. And, guys, we have baptized nearly 1,300 people so far this year. That's amazing. We've got a lot of brand-new people.

Our prayerful goal at the beginning of this year was, "God, would You please allow us to baptize 1,001." Why 1,001? Because there is always one more. And already 1,300. I'm praying for 2,001. That's how I'm praying. So, a whole bunch of brand-new people.

And we've got a bunch of you who have been following Jesus for a really, really long time. Here's my challenge. Every week I've got to stand up and say something that relates to all of y'all. Dude, that's a challenge. To say something that is going to be helpful to those pre-Christ, Brand-new Christ, and those of you mature in Christ. I don't even know how to do it. It's super challenging.

I'm not going to assume that you know what I'm talking about. So, let me give you a couple of terms. For many of you these are going to be by way of review. Others of you, it may be brand-new. It's so important to understand when we talk about this idea of spiritual growth and maturity in Christ. Here's the first one: salvation. This is not all that it is, but this is essentially what it is.

Salvation: We are saved by faith in the finished work of Jesus.

Salvation is that we are saved by grace, through faith in the finished work of Jesus. That's salvation. And it's a gift that is given to us by God. We don't earn it. Jesus paid it all.



Now, here's the second term that we need to talk more about and that's the term: sanctification. And this is not all that it is, but this is essentially what it is

Sanctification: We grow more and more into the image and likeness of Jesus.

Now, not everybody who receives salvation enters into the work of sanctification. See, one happens in an instant. Your salvation happens in a moment. You go from darkness to light. You go from death to life.

Now, I'm not saying that there is not a whole bunch of stuff that happens prior to that, because if you come to know Jesus, likely God has been pursuing you, maybe for years, preparing the soil of your heart, so that in a moment you would give your life to Jesus. That can happen instantaneously.

Sanctification happens progressively over time and it takes place for the rest of our physical lives. None of us ever arrive. There is always more to do. It's kind of like, any of you ever learned a new skill? Maybe playing an instrument or learning a new language. Maybe pickleball or golf.

You've got to practice it, be devoted to it. You've got to get in and apply what you need to learn. You've got to do it over and over again. Lots of repetition. And even then, if you've been doing something for a really long time, there is always more to do. There is always room to grow. There is more to get better at, "There is always somebody else who is a little bit better than I am."

And I want you to think about your sanctification, your personal holiness, like learning a new skill. It's not enough to just read about it or to know about it or to walk into a gym somewhere or a place where they teach you how to play instruments or whatever. It's not enough to just know about it. You've got to actually do it, you actually have to have life application and you grow in it more and more.

Now, oftentimes as your pastor around here, especially for people who are brand-new to our church, if I have a chance to meet them, I might ask them a question like this. Maybe you get this question too when people find out where you go. They say, "Are you guys like this big seeker church where it's all about reaching people? Or are you a Bible teaching church that is all about growing people? Are you just about casting nets wide reaching anybody and everybody? Or are you just trying to grow people? Is quality more important than quantity?"



Listen. That is such a great question. But, and this is not meant to be a cop out by any stretch, the answer to that is both. We have to be both because that's what Jesus has called us to be. We see this modeled in the first century church in the book of Acts. It's just a historical record of how the church got started. In Acts, chapter 2, we see this go down. Our boy, Peter, who wrote the letter that we are studying in this series, he was there at the birth of the church. He played a vital role in it. It was actually one of Peter's sermons that launched the big C church.

In Acts, chapter 2 we see Peter preaching the paint off of the walls. And listen to the response in verse 41 of chapter 2:

"Those who believed what Peter said," which implies not everybody did, "were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all." (NLT)

Can I just make this observation? They were a big church from day one, like right out of the gate—3,000 people after one sermon. Do you want to know how long it took our church to be a church of 3,000 people? About 170 years. That's how long it took.

Some of you have no idea what I'm talking about and some of you do. Our church got started in 1834 and we were a small church for most of that time, up until about 2011. That is when we first hit 3,000 people.

I only make that point to say this. It took us 170 years to grow to be 3,000 people, it took them a day. Talk about an organizational nightmare. It sounds awesome from a distance; but translated here's what that was. In the book of Acts, they had 3,000 spiritual infants making spiritual messes in their spiritual diapers. That was what was going on. It was a mess.

So, they grew wide really, really fast and immediately in the next verse they realized they needed to grow deep really, really fast. Look at verse 42:

"All the believers," what's the word? Say it out loud, "devoted themselves to the apostles" say it out loud, "teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper)," not inclusively, but including, "and to prayer. (NLT)

So what we see right here out of the gate, immediately upon their conversion they devoted themselves to teaching and to fellowship and to sharing meals, and to prayer. Why? So that they could grow. The church was both. Unapologetically wide, because the mission is urgent.



Listen, man. We are unapologetically wide. Part of our Mission Statement is to clear the way. Man, we will do anything short of sin to reach people in our city and around the world for Jesus, because life is short and eternity is long. And this message is too good to keep to ourselves. And if you are not excited about sharing the message, then you've forgotten what you've been saved from.

Yet, they immediately knew that they also had to go deep. Why? Because life is hard. And as we said last week, trials are coming. And the enemy is deceptive. And he fights dirty. We need to grow and growth is enabling us to stand firm in the faith.

I used to think, growing up in church, that discipleship was optional. I was like, "Oh, you know, that's extra credit. I'm saved by grace through faith and whether or not I grow—that's sort of optional. But it's not optional. Now, it is not essential for your salvation, but it is essential for your maturity.

Listen, man. If a church is wide without depth, here's what happens. We are tempted to go light on sin and to cater to people's comfort rather than challenge them toward transformation.

If a church is deep without width, then we can easily overlook the mission Jesus gave us to leave the 99 and go and find the one. We think that it's all about gazing at our belly buttons so that we can grow big, fat Bible heads. But that's not what this is about.

It's both, man. Unapologetically both. What does deep and wide look like? Deep and wide looks like this: we want to equip you, not entertain you. We want to build you up, not beat you up. We want to challenge you, not condemn you. We want to call you to a high level of commitment, matched with a high level of grace.

You need to understand the tone in which I say this. We are not going to cater to you or tell you how great you are so that you'll come back. Other churches will do that. We love you too much not to be clear about the truth so that in these divided times your spiritual roots will go deep so you won't falter or fail.

Man, as your pastor... I said this last week, I don't want to wait for you to have a crisis of faith, I want you to have an unshakeable faith that is ready to stand firm regardless of what life throws at you.

I had a mentor in college. And I remember him saying this in class one time. I didn't really know what he was saying at first, but now I get it. He said this, "If you baby Christians you get baby Christians."



And something that I'm learning is that time, in and of itself, man, does not always equal growth or maturity, does it? Biological age does not automatically translate to wisdom or emotional health.

What is sadder than seeing a young person who is really immature is to see an older person who is still living immaturity. Years of church attendance do not automatically translate to spiritual depth.

You can hang out in a gym all you want taking gym selfies, but if you never break a sweat and if you never lift anything heavier than your iPhone, then eventually somebody is going to ask you to help them lift a couch and you're going to be found out.

See, Paul expresses this. It took Paul two letters to write to a group of Christians in Corinth that he was really, really frustrated with. This is part of the reason why. He was writing to a group of Christians who were not growing. Listen to what he writes in verses 1 through 3 of chapter 3:

"Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you I couldn't talk to you as I would to spiritual people. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in Christ." There is that term. I had to feed you with milk, not with solid food, because you weren't ready for anything stronger. And you still aren't ready, for you are still controlled by your sinful nature." (NLT)

One of the marks of immature Christians is that they are controlled by their sinful nature. Some of you may be like, "Wait a minute. We're all sinners." Yes, we are. It's not a matter of like whether or not you're going to sin, it's a matter of after the moment you sin what's your response? Is your response to shrug it off? Is your response to sweep it under the rug? Is your response to accommodate or normalize it? Or is your response that you are convicted over it and to confess it and to repent of it and grow from it? That's the right response.

So, from our text today, Peter is going to urge us to mature in Christ. Let me give you two reasons why you need to mature in Christ and then we're going to jump into the meat of the text. If you are taking notes here is the first one. Here's why you need to grow.

Strength to endure trials when they come.

You need strength to endure trials when they come. Because they are coming. That is what last week's message was all about—pain and suffering are not picky. They are not looking at your life to say, "Well, is this a good person or not?" And then, "If you are a good person then I guess just they won't come into your life."



No, man. It doesn't matter. Pain and suffering, trials—there are a lot of reasons for them, to get into that is a whole other sermon, but pain and trials are coming. It's not about avoiding trials. It's not about trying to figure out who's to blame. It's not about growing in bitterness.

You can do all of those things. Or, you can start exercising spiritual muscles to prepare for them when they come. So, you're just like, "You know what? I'm going to grow and mature so that I can stand firm and handle it when trials come my way."

Jesus one time told a story about some seed that fell onto some soil. The seed, in the parable, represented the gospel, and the soil represents human hearts. And He said some of the soil was rocky, and some was shallow, and the seed laid there and didn't have a chance to root and the birds of the air snapped it.

And what He was doing is, He was illustrating how it's possible for us to make an initial decision to follow Jesus, salvation, but if there is no depth or nourishment, then there is no sanctification and the seed of the gospel is at risk to be swept away, snatched up, or choked out.

And if your faith doesn't deepen, it's not going to stand firm. When tragedy strikes, relationships fall apart, church leaders disappoint you, or culture challenges you. If your spiritual roots are shallow, in those moments you'll be susceptible to bitterness and vulnerable to temptation.

A reason why you need to take this message seriously about spiritual growth is just to prepare for life's trials. Here's the second one:

Awareness of the purpose God has for your life!

You're just aware that God has so much more for you, man. Jesus was clear that He came so that we might have an abundant life, life to the fullest—John 10:10. And if you're just skimming the surface of the Christian life, then you don't know what you're missing out on.

See, many of us have a temptation to treat salvation as a life insurance policy and in reality it's more like a mutual fund. Salvation isn't just about getting to heaven one day when you die, off into the future. It sort of provides peace of mind, but not really much benefit in the here and now.



Now, unfortunately, that's how many people treat the Christian life. Maybe you say a prayer, you raise a hand, you check the box of salvation, you tuck that away like a life insurance policy in a drawer or in your back pocket, somewhere just in case. It's your get out of hell free card—your eternal security—but you never really expect to live it. You are kind of waiting for heaven, but missing the joy, the peace, the purpose, the transformation that could be yours right now.

See, following Jesus isn't like a life insurance policy, it's more like a mutual fund. You know the difference between the two of them. A mutual fund is something that you invest in regularly. And as you do you begin to experience returns in this life. There is compounding growth. There is fruit from that. There is a sense of maturity and purpose and fulfillment that builds over time. Life just works better because this is the Creator of the universe and He knows how things work. Jesus did not just come to give you eternal life. He came to give you life to the full in the here and the now.

So, from this text I've got four things that I want to share with you coming right out of the text, and then I'll be done. Alright? So, four things—four ways we can mature in Christ right out of the text. The first is:

Grow: Mentally

Grow mentally—your thought life. Look at what it says in verse 13:

"So prepare," that means do this ahead of time, "your minds for action," That's interesting. Most of the time we say prepare your bodies for action, this says prepare your minds for action:

"and exercise self-control. Put all your hope in the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world." (NLT)

Now, verse 13 in the original Greek literally reads this way, "Gird up the loins of your mind." And I don't know about you but the word loins does not work its way into my everyday vernacular. A little weird.

But the reason why it says it that way is because in the first century, they would often have to go to battle and they would have long flowing robes. So, they had to be ready. To go into battle they had to be able to pick up all that extra loose clothing and stuff it into their belt so that they wouldn't trip on it when they were running into battle.



This is what he is saying as it relates to our thoughts. We live in a world that typically places much more emphasis and value on feeling rather than thinking or reasoning. So, they would say things like this, "I don't really understand, I don't really know what the lyrics of that song are saying, but it's got a good vibe. It makes me feel good." Or, "I know it's not right but I've got to follow my heart and be true to myself."

Oftentimes we evaluate church services more on how they make us feel than what we learn.

Now, please don't misunderstand me. Don't get me wrong. God has given us emotions for our good. We were created as emotional beings. I can't imagine living life without excitement, laughter, grief, joy—even fear and anger. They all have their place. In fact, the Bible even says that there is a time for all of those emotions: a time to weep, a time to grieve, a time to laugh.

But God has also given us the capacity to reason and think, Isaiah 1:18, "Come, let us reason together, says the Lord."

In 1 Corinthians, chapter 10, verses 4 — 5, which are maybe the most pertinent verses as it relates to preparing your minds for action is that Paul is encouraging those Corinthian Christians to use their minds so that (I'm paraphrasing the passage) they knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments.

In other words he's saying, "In a world that says that you've either got to love people or speak the truth but you can't do both," Paul says, "You've got to do both. Actually the way that you love people effectively is to effectively and graciously deliver and embody the truth."

So, you love people, you destroy arguments. You don't destroy people and accommodate arguments. You love people and destroy their arguments. Why? Because you've got to allow the Holy Spirit to speak through you to set them free from the deceptions. You've got to use your mind to do that.

One of the things that I'm really somewhat concerned about in our culture is that we've been so overwhelmed by this wave of emotion that we've sort of checked our brains out and we no longer know how to fully articulate the work that God is doing in our life or even know how to discern what is truth and what is deception.

We've got to be students of the Bible to know when somebody misuses Scripture to accommodate what they really want to do, so you can lovingly go, "Uh-uh. No, it actually does not say that." And you've got to use your mind to do that.



See, we live in a world that right now where I think that we're not exercising our minds enough so we are out of shape. Last week was my first week back to preach in like eight or nine weeks. And I was tired. I went home and I was like, "Man, I forgot that there is such a thing as preaching shape." There is man. I can go five, six, seven weeks in a row and I'm not as tired. But if I take a break and come back it's like working out. I was like, "Man, I've got to get back in shape."

Same thing with our minds. And if you aren't engaging with your mind, here's what I'm afraid of, The statistics are crazy right now—statistics are saying that almost every generation, but especially the younger generations, if you add it all up, at the end of our life we will spend about 20 years of our life scrolling.

Some of you are like, "Wait a minute, pastor. I have to do that for work." Okay, let's just take that in half—10 years of your life scrolling. That's still a decade, man. It's called death scrolling, just numbing. And most of the stuff we see on social media is not solid content. Most of it is AI based. Most of it is emotion. Most of it is bots. That's what is discipling us. We're just checking our brains at the door. It's just outrage and emotion.

Now, listen. I'm not against AI and ChatGPT. They have a time and a place. But how many of us when we don't know how to respond to somebody we run to ChatGPT and say, "Would you please correctly respond?"

Or, we're seeking theological questions from ChatGPT. Man, can I just tell you ChatGPT is not your friend. It will tell you what you think you want to know. And it will lie to you and it won't give you great information. And I'm not down on ChatGPT. But don't email me a response if you have ChatGPT right now. Don't do that.

Listen, man. Rather than running to ChatGPT, run to God's Word. Are you able to discern...? I hear things all of the time on social media that are deceptions and twisting of the truth. We are like, "Oh, that just kind of sounds good." And so we run after it.

When I was in my early 30s I realized something needed to change with my health because I was really unhealthy. I was eating poorly, not exercising, I knew I needed to change but I didn't know what to do.

So, I just went with what felt right. I got a gym membership and I went in but I didn't know what to do. I didn't even know what machines did what. So, I just stood in front of the mirror and did bicep curls the whole time, "Maybe this will give me six pack abs. I don't know." I didn't know what I was doing.



And then I started going to lunch and I'd go to O'Charley's or Chili's or something and I would really want a burger but I wanted to eat healthily so I got the salad. So, I ordered this pecan crusted chicken salad with balsamic vinegar. I thought, "Oh, man. That feels healthier." I had a little pride in that for having a salad.

And then I read one of those books that actually compared foods and I realized... Listen. The pecan crusted chicken salad had more calories than the burger. And I was like, "Bro! I've been deceiving myself this whole time because that actually felt healthier," but it wasn't even healthy.

In the same way there are a whole lot of narratives right now that either come up through your own flesh or in the world that appear right. The Bible says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death," it's based on emotion, based on some feelings that are not wise or true.

Can I just urge you with this? Do not let those manipulate you or rob you of the nourishment that leads you to growth in true life. You will only discern what is truly wise and truly true by devoting yourself to God's Word. So, eat this [your Bible] not this [your phone]. Crave this [the Bible] not that [your phone]. And this [your phone] has a time and this has a place. I'm not anti-technology. Be honest. Which is discipling you more?"

See, mature Christ followers know how to contend for the faith by using their minds rather than being steered by emotions and swept up by the spirit of the age. Why, man? Because we're in a spiritual war. And we need to wake up with a wide-eyed, sober-minded faith in God's wisdom and promises.

Here's the next way that we position ourselves to grow:

Grow: Morally

We grow morally. Look at verse 14:

"So you must live as God's obedient children. Don't slip back into your old ways of living to satisfy your own desires. You didn't know any better then. But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy. For the Scriptures say, 'You must be holy because I am holy.'" (NLT)

Can I just go ahead and point out what you're probably already thinking? Don't you think that's a little extreme? Be holy? How often do we speak in those kinds of terms? If we were rewriting this what would we say? We'd probably be like, "Hey, man. Just try your best to be holy. If it's convenient, be holy. Just make a valid effort."



But this is so definitive. Be holy, as God is holy. You're like, "Man, you might as well tell me to be a semi-truck as God is a semi-truck. Because how in the world am I supposed to do this?"

Now, last week I gave a definition of holiness. And holiness just simply means to be set apart. And only God is holy. Nobody is holy. So, when God told the Israelites that He was holy, He meant that He was different or distinct from them. God isn't like us or just a little bit above us, He is wholly other than us.

We might be doing generous, faithful, merciful, just, loving, humble pure things, but we are not those things. God is those things. That's what makes Him holy. So, what this text is saying is, "Since you've been purchased and redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, you are no longer your own. The Holy Spirit now lives in you setting you apart.

We are saved by grace through faith in an instant, and then we will spend the rest of our lives growing in holiness by faith through a process and it's going to take utter determination to do that.

Here's a word picture that I think is really, really helpful. In Revelation Jesus says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." Right now Jesus is knocking on the door of your heart. If you've never let Him in, He's knocking at the door of your heart. I believe somebody listening to the sound of my voice right now, that's what is happening. And when you allow...when you open up that door and receive Jesus, He comes in. The Bible says that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. And when you allow Jesus to occupy your life, He comes into the front door.

That's salvation. You're saved. Jesus just moved in.

Now, here's what holiness and sanctification look like. Jesus starts to look around. He's like, "Hey, what is behind that door?" And your response is, "Oh, Jesus. There is nothing in here. You see this room over here? Jesus, you can't have access to that room." In fact, not only is the door shut, the door is locked and there is like yellow crime tape in front of it, "Don't go into that room Jesus."

And here's what holiness is, it's Jesus saying, "I didn't die just to be your Savior, I died to be Lord, which means that I get invited into every room in the house and I get to do renovations." Many times we don't like that. See, personal holiness is we allow Jesus into every room of our hearts.

And, listen. You're not going to get there overnight. One of the things we like to say around here is, "We are in process making progress covered by God's grace."



You know, I love it... One of my favorite conversations around here is when I bump into one of y'all in the lobby or I'll be in the Meijer parking lot somewhere. And somebody will run up to me who may be new to our church and he is like, "Pastor, Pastor. We just started attending and, man, that was one blankety, blank of a great sermon on Sunday."

They are so new that they don't even know that they probably shouldn't say that. I love it. I love it so much. Don't stop. The reason why I love it is because that tells me that we are reaching the people who need Jesus the most, not just reshuffling the deck from other churches.

However... You are not going to like this next part. However, after placing your trust in Jesus as Savior, now it's time to start letting Him move into the rooms of your heart and life as Lord. Lord over your sexuality. Lord over your money. Lord over your values, your time, your thoughts, your entertainment choices. That's holiness.

Listen, man. We are saved by grace, just don't take advantage of it. There is a fine line between naivety, "I didn't know," and defiance, "Oh, I know. I just don't like it." There is a fine line between innocence and rebelliousness. Don't confuse the two. Grace covers the innocent and naivety. But God's judgment is racing toward those who know, but they choose to accommodate rather than to repent.

I'm told that when I was a toddler I couldn't pronounce my Ts very well. They came across as Fs. And my favorite word was truck. So, I'll let you make the connection. Some of you are like, "I don't get it." Explain it to them after. Alright? Explain it to them after.

Now, my mom was mortified that her cute little boy was running around cussing like a sailor. And you know what? It was cute. They could laugh at it. I didn't know any better. I was just a little kid. It sounded funny coming from a little kid—10 years later, not so funny.

Same thing is true spiritually speaking. Can I just ask you this? For some of you, you've been following Jesus for a long time, and there is no evidence of growth. This is for you to open yourself up to the Lord right now. In what area of your life, right now, is the Holy Spirit convicting you of? Right now, in an area of personal holiness.

I don't know, man. I don't know what it is for you. It could be your mouth. Maybe it's not cussing. Maybe it's things you find funny, things that you forward to other people. Maybe it's some sort of a substance. Maybe it's a screen, entertainment choices or what you're doing with your body.



See, there is a time when you were like, "Well, I didn't know." But now you know. And what you do with it now makes all of the difference. Start taking steps under the banner of God's grace while you can. Start taking steps of personal holiness—not because you're trying to be holier than thou, but because you understand what you've been saved from. Not because you're trying to earn anything, but because you're trying to emulate the character of your heavenly Dad who bought your salvation. You are no longer your own.

A great understanding of holiness is this sentiment often attributed to Martin Luther. I love what he said. He said this, "We are saved by grace alone, but the grace that saves is never alone. It always comes with actionable behavior and fruit."

Peter drives down further on this in verses 17 to 20. He says: "And remember that the heavenly Father to whom you pray has no favorites. He will judge or reward you according to what you do."

There is a day of judgment coming that is racing toward all of us. And I'm going to tell you it's going to be brutal for all of us, because He's going to judge everything we did or didn't do. There will be rewards doled out and there will be punishment that is doled out. Those of us in Christ will be reconciled and saved from that, but we'll still have to give an account. There is still a judgment that is coming. So, man, you be ready for that. And he goes:

"So you must live in reverent fear of him," this isn't a paralyzing fear, this is a respect where respect is due, and "your time here as 'temporary residents. 'For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And it was not paid with mere gold or silver," if Peter were writing this to us today he would say, "Paid with bitcoin or dollars, "which lose their value. It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. God chose him as your ransom long before the world began," In other words, He knew that was what He was going to do from the beginning of time. That is how sovereign He is.

"but now in these last days he has been revealed for your sake. Through Christ you have come to trust in God. And you have placed your faith and hope in God because he raised Christ from the dead and gave him great glory." (NLT)

Here's why we strive toward maturity in Christ. We strive toward holiness, recognizing that the sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross for us is costly.

Never forget that just because grace is free for you that it is free. It's not cheap. It cost the life of God's only Son, Jesus. So, now I strive toward holiness, not because my actions save me, but out of gratitude of what Jesus has done to save me.



And you know the reason why we need to strive toward holiness? Just a little sidebar here. I think part of the reason why we are in this... I do believe that we are in an awakening, a revival, a resurgence whatever you want to call it. I think that is what is happening right now in our culture. I actually think there are two things happening right now. I think there is a great resurgence and that there is great resistance. You've got to decide which side you're on.

I think both of those things are happening and part of the reason why they are happening is because society and culture are realizing that they've tried on unholiness and it promised much but delivered little. And it's just left them with empty lives, empty relationships, empty bank accounts, empty expectations. Sleeping around, living it up, pursuing cheap thrills all eventually catch up and you realize that that lifestyle promised much but returned very little. Holiness is where it is at.

Let me give you another reason to grow. I've got two more.

Grow: Relationally

Look at verse 22:

"You were cleansed from your sins when you obeyed the truth, so now you must show sincere love to each other as brothers and sisters. Love each other deeply with all your heart." (NLT)

Now, we often talk a lot about the love we are to have for the world. And that's true. We should. This is talking about the love we should have for one another. And he says here, "Brothers and sisters within the church family, your spiritual growth requires you not just to say that you love each other but to show that you love each other."

Which means that spiritual growth requires you to be connected to and invest in a church family. Now, I know the objections because I've heard them all before. There is a sentiment that I hear all of the time from people, and technically there is some truth to it, but it's laced with deception.

You probably already know what I'm getting ready to say before I even say it. I hear this all of the time. Maybe you even believe it. You'll say, "Well, Pastor. I don't have to go to church to believe in God or to attend a church service to be a Christian. In fact, I don't really have to go to church to commune with God. I can go to the mountains. I can go to the beach." And many of you do.



That's not what I'm talking about. Listen. Technically you are right in the sense that your salvation is not connected to where you are sitting right now in a church service. You can pray with God on the mountain and on the beach because God is everywhere. But, listen. Your salvation is not connected to your church attendance.

But your growth is connected to your church attendance, precisely because you cannot do this on your own. You have to do it with other people. And you are like, "But other people hurt me." Yep. Precisely. People are like sandpaper. And that's what will refine your faith and shape your heart.

Which means this. Online is a great supplement. You can't stay there. Showing up once a month and dunking in and out and never talking to anybody, never getting connected, never serving, never getting into a group, never applying what it is that you hear, you're not going to grow.

And oftentimes the knock on any church... I hear this all of the time for us. Somebody will say, "Well, I attended your church and nobody said hi to me." Man, can I tell you that when I hear that it rips my guts out. I hate that. I hate that anybody had that experience.

But, ironically, you know something else that I also hear? "I attended your church and everybody wouldn't leave me alone. They said hi to me too much. I got said hi to in the parking lot, and at the door, and at the coffee bar, and at my seat and I just want to be left alone." Here's the deal, man. Could you just tell me the right amount of times you should be greeted? And we'll go after that. Alright? I don't know. I don't know.

Now, here's the deal when it comes to all of that. I just very lovingly want to give you this to consider. If you've ever gone to church and nobody said hi to you, you are assuming that everybody that you come across is a regular. What if they are new too? What if they are hurting too? And they looked at you and you didn't say anything to them and they thought, "Well, they don't care about me?" And you were both new.

One of the things I love to do, man, is that when we're traveling and I go to a church and nobody knows who I am... Which is glorious, by the way. It's amazing. It's amazing. I will go and here's what I like to do. I like to find somebody who looks like they are lost, it's their first time and I walk up to him, "Hey, man. Is this your first time?" And he is like, "Yeah." And I'm like, "Oh, well welcome to the church, man. Come on. Let me show you around." I have no idea where I am going, it's my first time. But I just want to be loving and I just want to be a warm example to them.



Listen. You can do that too. When two strangers meet each other somebody has got to go first. Can I just share this with you? Don't assume that everybody here is a regular just assume every time you come to church.... This will automatically make your church experience better, if you apply this one thing. Don't just show up and be like, "What am I going to get out of it?"

I want you to get something out of it. I study and pray and prep (and our team does too) for hours every week so that you get something out of it. I don't want to waste your time. But when you can shift your mentality from, "What will I get out of it?" to, "What can I bring to it?" It radically revolutionizes your growth.

See, the point is this. You will get out of church what you put into it. Put very little into it, you won't get anything out of it. That is true in life. That is true in health, marriage, finances, relationships. Why wouldn't it be true here? If you never talk to anybody, if you never get into a group, if you come late and leave early, if you only stay online, if you never give of your time and treasure, then you are not going to grow.

That's why we have five expectations for you. We've said, "If you're going to be part of our church fam: Come ready—just come expectant every weekend to have an encounter with God. Man your station—find a place to serve. Don't make it about you, make it about others. Find your crew—get involved in a group, if that group is weird, bounce out and find another one. Give your first and your best. Invest and invite. I unapologetically call you to this because we know that that will facilitate your growth.

I want to encourage you to sign up for Rooted. Registration is open. It may be the one single thing that has just been a catalyst of growth for thousands of people in our church. If you've been blessed by Rooted can you just let me know that right now? If you've gone through that...

Now, here's the deal. For some of you clapping, who have been through Rooted some of you need to lead Rooted. You've been through Rooted three times, stop receiving. Start serving a meal.

Last thing. I am so out of time. Last one:

Grow in your understanding or your perspective.

Let me finish the passage. Verse 23:

"For you have been born again, but not to a life that will quickly end. Your new life will last forever because it comes from the eternal, living word of God. As the Scriptures say; 'People are like grass their beauty is like a flower in the field. The grass withers and the flower fades But the word of the Lord remains forever.' And that word is the Good News that was preached to you."



Translation, what you feel to be true is temporary. The Word of God is forever.

"So get rid of all evil behavior. Be done with all deceit, hypocrisy, jealousy, and all unkind speech. Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation. Cry out for this nourishment, now that you have had a taste of the Lord's kindness." (NLT)

If you don't know what to do, man, you just cry out. Maybe that's where some of you are, "I want to grow. How do I grow?" Man, that is a great place to start. That question right there, "God, I want to grow. Would you help me grow? I've been a believer for years but I've not been growing. I've been immature in my faith."

There could be any reasons for that. It could be a divorce. It could be a broken relationship. I could be unemployment. It could be pain. It could be a health thing. Any number of things can set your growth back. As long as you are drawing breath into your lungs and your heart is beating, God is not done with you yet.

I was talking to a sweet, older couple right before the last hour. I'm guessing they were in their late 70s. And they were talking to me and they were like, "Oh, Pastor. We've never met you before. Man, we're brand-new to the church." And they said this, "We have been in church our whole lives, but we're just now learning what the Bible really says. And we can't get enough of it."

Man, if it's not too late for them, it's not too late for you. Right now what is God urging you and pushing you into to grow?

What I love about Peter, I told you last week that he wrote this letter 30 years after the resurrection, he had 30 years to think about this. Peter is just writing what he knows. Peter has grown. Because, you know what? Peter was quite possibly the most emotional disciple there was.

His emotions had him all over the place. One minute he's walking on water, one minute he's sinking. One minute he's telling Jesus, "I'll never deny you." The next minute he's denying Him three times. And yet, Peter grew in his emotions and he grew in reason and he became a consistent, faithful disciple despite his fluctuating emotions.

Peter was not a very holy man at first. He was loud. He was prideful. He lost his temper upon occasion, but he grew to be more like his heavenly Father and eventually was crucified upside down. He finished well.



When Peter first came to Christ he was not very loving. He was prejudiced toward other people. He even tried to kill a man with a sword. But he grew in love and grace. He entered the home of a Gentile soldier who would have been his sworn enemy and shared the gospel with him. And now Peter says, "You can do that too. Enter into that process of growth."

So, here's how I just want to end. Right now I just want you to spend a moment or two and I just want you to pray and ask God to reveal an area in your life where you need to grow. If you would just bow your head and close your eyes.

The invitation, the action steps, there are two of them that I have for you. For those of you, now that you've had the gospel explained to you, maybe you're realizing, "You know what? I've never really invited Jesus in. I need to do that today. Saved by grace through faith, I place my trust in Him as Savior."

There is another invitation. I know for many of you, you've never made Him Lord. There is that room in your house that you've got double locked. You never want Him to enter in. That's the room He needs to enter in because He's Lord.

Maybe you've given your life to Jesus but you stayed a spiritual infant for the past year or 10 years and now it's time to wean off of the spiritual milk and get on to solid food and begin to grow, because trials are coming and Jesus wants something so much more for you. So would you be committed to whatever it is that He brings to mind? Would you give it to Him today? "Okay, that's the area that I'm going to lean in on. That's the area where I'm going to grow."

Father, thank You for Your grace that covers us. May we never take advantage of Your grace. May we lean in to grow because You have something so much more for us. God, we cry out for that nourishment that comes from You and by You. So, would You receive our worship in response today? We ask this in Jesus' name. And everybody said: Amen.

