

# Grow Together

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Good morning! Please open your Bibles to 2 Peter...

This morning, we're talking about the second part of our church's mission of making disciples – what it means to grow together. There are numerous passages that speak to how we should grow in obedience to Jesus. Many that talk about the process of biblical change – putting off the sinful old man, renewing our minds with Scripture and the gospel, and then putting on Christ-like attitudes, actions, and words. There are passages that speak to the particular commands of Christ and how we should obey them.

And there are also passages that address the motivations and reasons that we ought to grow in our walk with Christ. It is one of these latter passages that I have chosen to have us think about this morning, which is 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter and chapter 3.

So as you're turning there, let me ask you a question, "How is the world going to end?" Do you have an answer if that question was put to you? That's the question that was put to people in street interviews by National Geographic in 2016. I want to show you just a brief clip and some of the answers that people gave...

[\(Show video\)](#)

Well, we heard a lot of different answers there, didn't we? Some are closer than others, of course. Well, in 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter, we read what God says about what will happen when the world ends. But Peter is mainly concerned with how we live today in light of that coming day. So see if you can hear the reason that Peter gives for us to grow in Christ...

**Read 2 Peter 3:8-18**

So did you hear it? You now know how the world is going to end. At least, we have some idea as to what's going to happen. The heavenly bodies will be dissolved, the earth, and the works done on it will be exposed. And we will then experience the new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells.

In this last chapter, Peter talks about why a reason we ought to grow in our walk with Jesus. And it's one that we may not think about as often as we maybe ought to. It has to do with the end times – the final days of history when Jesus will come back and usher in His kingdom and all of His people will join Him forever in the New Heavens and New Earth. These final days are referred to by the authors of Scripture as the Day of the Lord.

And Peter is writing, in part, to address some questions that these early Christians had about the coming of the Day of the Lord. What will happen? When will it happen? And how should we live in light of the Day of the Lord?

But as I mentioned a moment ago, all of this is written for a reason. It's not just for interesting trivia. We are to live differently because the Day of the Lord is coming.

Peter's call for us is that in light of all of these things, we are to do what? He ends it all with this command in verse 18. This is what we're supposed to do...

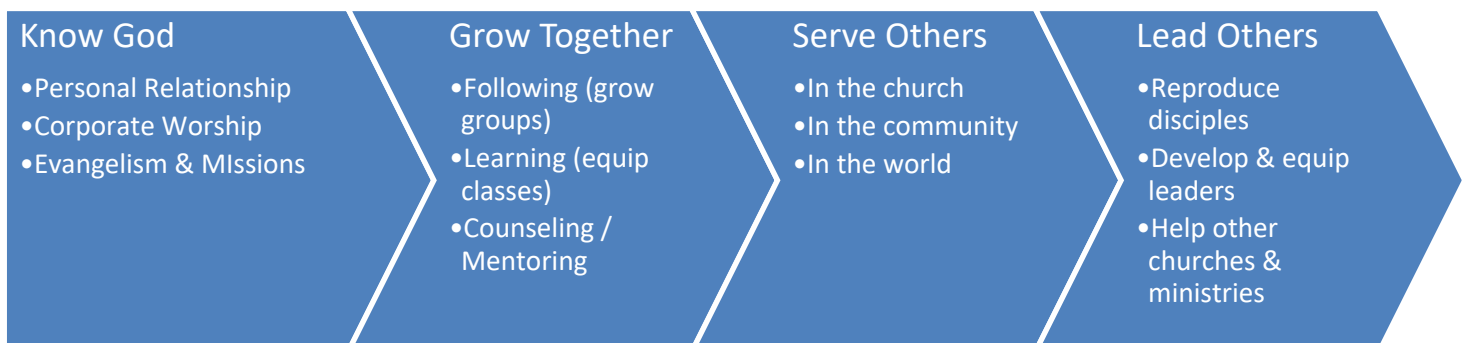
### **2 Peter 3:18**

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

We are to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We are to be increasingly growing in our obedience to Him and our knowledge of Him. It's a big deal – growing in Christ. It a big part of what we do as a church.

As I mentioned a moment ago, we're continuing our series on our church's mission today. By way of review...

## Make Disciples



This morning we're thinking about the next step in making disciples which we've labeled 'grow together.' Jesus says that as we make disciples, one aspect of that is teaching people **to obey** all that He commanded. We are not just to teach people, though that is part of it, we are to teach them 'to obey' all of His commands.

In other words, Jesus expects us as His followers to help other people follow Him and actually do all the things that He commands His followers to do.

This doesn't happen immediately, and it should progress over time. In other words, we should grow in our knowledge of Jesus's commands and in our obedience to them. Thus, a critical part of our mission as a church is to help people grow together in their walk with Jesus.

So in light of 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 3 and the command we have to grow in grace, I want to address two main questions: what does it mean to grow together and then secondly, how do we grow together particularly as Cornerstone Baptist Church?

## **What does it mean to grow together?**

So Peter here, under the inspiration of the Spirit says that we are to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I see two aspects of this growth. First

### **We grow together vertically**

We each individually ought to be growing in our walk with Christ alongside others who are also growing in their relationship with Christ. We can think of this as vertical growth in our relationship with God.

And Peter says that one of the ways we grow vertically is that we should grow in knowledge. We are to know more about God and His Word. We should work at rightly interpreting and applying the Scriptures to our lives. And we should continually be doing that for the rest of our lives – growing in our understanding and knowledge of God's Word.

There are some interesting statements that Peter makes in these verses about God's Word, aren't there? Look again at verses 15 and 16 again,

### **2 Peter 3:15-16**

And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, **16** as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

He mentions Paul's writings and says that there are some things in them that are hard to understand. Kind of like how Pastor Mike says some things that are kind of hard to understand (you know, I am obligated to make that joke because he would make it about me, and he's not here to dispute that)

Peter's point is essentially that Paul agrees with me. But there are some people who have twisted Paul's writings as they do the other Scriptures. So we learn that 1) Peter sees Paul's writings on par with the other Scriptures. Even very early on, churches recognized that Paul was writing with the wisdom of the Spirit of God and was producing Scripture. And 2) we learn that it is possible to be wrong in one's interpretation of Scripture, and that being wrong can have disastrous consequences. He says that there are people who twist Paul's writings to their own destruction.

There are times when we can say that good Christians disagree about what the Bible teaches and that there's room for fellowship still among them. But there are other times when the Scriptures have been twisted so that the truth of the gospel has been lost. And a twisted gospel is no gospel at all.

And because the stakes can be so high, Peter says that we need to be growing in the knowledge of Jesus. The Day of the Lord is coming, so make sure that you're ready for that day of judgment. Grow so that you're prepared.

So we should ask ourselves – are we growing in our knowledge of God's Word? Are we reading and re-reading the Scriptures, meditating on them day and night so that we're like a tree planted by streams of water? How are you doing at that Bible reading plan? It's not too late to get started or to catch up if you're a little behind. Don't quit! Press on! Grow in your knowledge of the Word.

In addition, Peter says we need to be growing in knowledge so that we can remain stable. Look at verse 17, **2 Peter 3:17**

You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability.

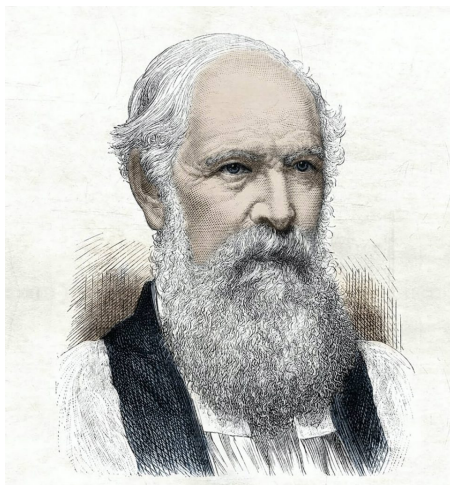
Don't be carried away by error. Paul says in Ephesians that one of the marks of immaturity is being tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine.

You know people like this, and must admit that I'm like this from time to time if I'm honest about it. I try this workout program or that diet or that productivity tool or this lifehack or that organizing technique – hoping that at the end of the day it will solve all of my problems that really stem from a desire to be comfortable and do what I want. My procrastination and laziness and self-indulgence lead me to try to take shortcuts. What ends up happening is that I become unstable.

And Peter here is warning against losing your stability in your spiritual walk. And the solution? Commit yourself to knowing the truth. If you don't want to be carried away all the time, bouncing from one thing to the next, from one spiritual fad to the next one, then you need to grow in the knowledge of Christ.

Not only do we grow in knowledge, we also grow in *grace*. Peter says, grow in grace and knowledge. One way to understand that is to say that we are to grow in acknowledging and applying the love of God to our lives. We grow in grace as we obey the commands of Christ, as we put off sin, and as we recall the truth of the gospel.

J.C. Ryle writes about growing in grace in his classic book called *Holiness*. He writes...



“When I speak of growth in grace, I only mean increase in the degree, size, strength, vigor and power of the graces which the Holy Spirit plants in a believer's heart. I hold that every one of those graces admits of growth, progress and increase. I hold that repentance, faith, hope, love, humility, zeal, courage and the like may be little or great, strong or weak, vigorous or feeble, and may vary greatly in the same man at different periods of his life. When I speak of a man growing in grace, I mean simply this—that his sense of sin is becoming deeper, his faith stronger, his hope brighter, his love more extensive, his spiritual-mindedness more marked.”

When we talk about growing in grace, it doesn't just mean that our lives get easier and easier. In fact, that may not be the case at all. Ryle says, as we grow in our relationship with Christ and knowledge of His Word, then we may find that our awareness of our sin is also increased.

Have you had times when your awareness of your selfishness was brought out? I get the opportunity to meet with folks who are preparing for marriage, and one of the things I tell this is this: getting married reveals our selfishness! It doesn't create it in us – it reveals what was there in my heart all the time. Having kids does that even more! In fact, anytime you are caring for others when they can't do anything for you in return, your selfish heart may be exposed.

But as we grow, we also come to appreciate the beauty of God's forgiveness and patience and kindness toward us. We understand more and more about what it means that God loves us and cares for us. And so we want to please Him and obey His good commands for us. More and more, we want to grow in grace vertically in our relationship with God.

So we grow alongside one another as we grow together. But not only that...

**We grow together horizontally.**

We not only seek to grow vertically in our relationship with God but also horizontally. We want our relationships with others to deepen as well.

So our growth is not just in parallel with other believers, the way that participants in an online class might. Have you ever had to do training for work or take a class in school through a computer? The whole group could all be watching the same videos and reading the same things but you never interact with anyone else. Friends, the church isn't designed to be like that.

Rather, we grow together as the Spirit deepens our relationships horizontally with one another. As we learn the Scriptures and go through the joys and struggles of the Christian life, we become more and more intertwined with the other Christians God has placed around us.

You could think of it like some vines growing up a trellis. They may start out as individual plants, but as they grow vertically up the trellis and also more and more intertwined with one another. Our lives become woven together.

Paul will say in Colossians that he wants the Christians at the church in Laodicea to know his struggle for them...why?

### **Colossians 2:2**

that their hearts may be encouraged, **being knit together in love**, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ,

That's how our lives should be – we should be knit together, like a fabric is knit together. So that when one rejoices, others rejoice with him or her. And when one struggles, others are there to help. That's the process of growing together until we reach the riches of the fullness of Christ.

So God wants us to grow together. Do you believe that? Do you believe that God desires that you would be closer to Him now than you were last year at this time? Do you believe that God wants you to know *more* about who He is and what it means to follow Him? Do you believe that we shouldn't settle for whatever knowledge you have now or be content with whatever sin still haunts you? Until the Day of the Lord arrives, God wants you to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **How do we grow together at Cornerstone?**

I also want to remind you about how we seek to do this part of our mission here, specifically at Cornerstone. But you and I need to remember that these are just strategies to help us grow. It's possible to do a lot of these things and yet not grow if you're not committed to taking whatever faith step God is calling you to day by day. We're like Morpheus, we can only show you the way...

So how do we try to help people grow together?

### **Grow Groups**

We do that primarily through meeting with small groups of Christians, and we call them grow groups – just to reinforce the purpose of these groups.

And though they may do more than this, we want all of our groups doing a few things when they meet. These aren't just club meetings – we want there to be spiritual purpose to them. And so we ask our groups to pray together. We want our groups to be

places where the burdens and joys of life are shared and brought before our heavenly Father.

We also want our groups to have genuine fellowship. Healthy groups share life – they enjoy one another’s company, maybe around food or service or hanging around a bonfire or all kinds of different things. We want our groups to have fellowship – that’s the way that relationships deepen. It’s how we get to know others and allow ourselves to be known by others.

And third, we want our groups to be Word-centered. Groups may study a lot of different things. I’m a part of a men’s group that simply prays together and reads through books of the Bible. Other groups discuss the sermons, or do a video study through RightNow Media or DVD’s, or they may read other books on the Christian life. We don’t meet just to fill up time around other Christians; we want to help each other grow in grace.

So let me challenge you – are you in a grow group? If you aren’t, what’s stopping you? We don’t try to pick your friends for you, so you can find a list of our groups online and when they meet and request to join that way. Or you can talk to a pastor, and we can try to suggest some that may be a good fit. You can try it before you buy – visit a group, kick the tires, see if it’s a good fit. We’d love to have you visit a group if that’s your next step.

If you are in a group or you’ve been visiting around one for a while, let me ask you – are you active in that group? Do you make efforts to prioritize being there?

I have to admit, I’m not always in the right mind-set about meeting with my grow group. But sometimes, we go not because we need to be served, but because God may want us to serve someone else. Being faithful and reliable is a service to your brothers and sisters in Christ. So if you’re in a group, how are you doing at leaning in to serve one another and pray for one another and encourage one another and even challenge or confront one another if needed? We all need that to help us grow together in grace.

### **Equip Classes**

Another way we seek to help one another grow is through what we call equip classes. These are designed to be focused on biblical content – studying the Bible or theology,



church history, or issues related to the Christian life. We offer a few of these on Sunday mornings between services. We hope to expand that this year, perhaps offering some other classes on Sunday evenings or during the week. These are aimed at growing in knowledge. We want to be better equipped to rightly understand the Bible and its application to our lives.

There are a few equip classes happening right now – there's a study walking through the life of Abraham in Genesis, there's one on church history beginning in February, there's one for ladies on the names of God, the youth are studying principles of Bible study, and the middle school girls are working through a book together. We'd love to get you connected to growing in the knowledge of Christ and His Word.

### **Counseling / Mentoring**

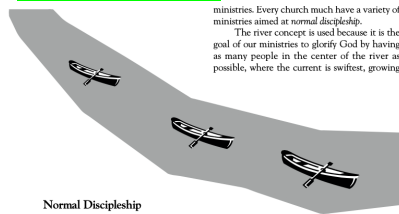
A third way that we try to help one another grow is through counseling or mentoring. This is simply trying to help a brother or sister follow Jesus with some specific issue or during a specific season in life. I mentioned having the opportunity to help several couples with premarital counseling so that they would be better prepared for marriage. People may need help with grief or marriage struggles or issues with parenting or battles with addiction or life-dominating sins. There are all kinds of reason that a person may need targeted help in following Jesus. And there's no shame in that!

If you want help with some issue in your life, please reach out. We would much rather be involved earlier in the process than wait until the issue blows up. And let me say this too – we can't solve all your problems for you. Your pastors are not super-men. But we can point you to the Savior who is the only one who can truly give what you need.

I tell people who meet with me that I've been trained in helping people look at the Scriptures and apply them to their lives, and I've seen God do amazing things. But I also recognize that there are real issues, especially around trauma or mental illness, that I am not skilled in addressing. So we point people to Christian counselors who can provide help with those areas.

So if you find yourself in the position of needing help, or you need counsel or mentoring, please reach out, we'd love to walk with you through that however we can.

(show picture)

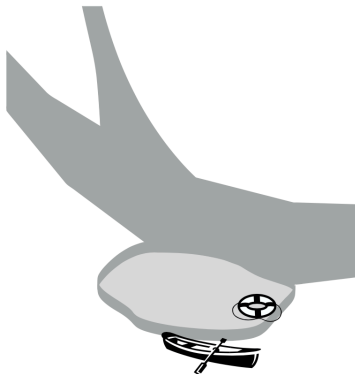


I picked up this image from Faith Church here in town, and they talk about the 'discipleship river' of their ministry.

The normal pattern of discipleship is knowing God personally in worship services, engaging in the spiritual disciplines of Bible reading and prayer, and being a part of

a grow group or equip class. But from time to time, a person may need additional help...

(show next picture)



He or she may need to spend some time along the side of the river getting specific help. That's what we would call intensive discipleship or counseling. It's simply applying the Word of God more specifically to a person or situation.

So that's generally how we seek to help people grow together as a church.

Let me close with this - three statements from me, Pastor Nathan, about growing together at Cornerstone in the years ahead...I'll be brief.

1. Being a part of loving community is critical for our spiritual health

It is possible to be a Christian and not be in a small group. We're not saved by going to a grow group. That said, I don't believe it's wise to try to navigate your spiritual walk without a community of Christians around you who know you and love you and who you know and love. You were not designed for isolation. You were created to be a part of a family of Christians who help each other grow. In the years ahead, the health of this church will largely be reflected by the health of our groups.

2. Knowledge about God and His Word will help us remain steadfast against the waves of worldly philosophy in our culture

I think that many Christians are underprepared for the spiritual battles that are happening around us and that will be coming in future years. We need to be better acquainted with our Bibles and good theology. We should learn from our brothers and sisters who have gone before and fought many of these same kinds of battles with different contexts in other times and in other places. If we're going to stand firm, we need to be equipped for the battles that are coming.

3. Getting counsel and/or mentoring in different seasons of the Christian life is healthy and should not be seen as weakness

I think there has too often been a stigma around asking for help. Now, many younger people don't share that same embarrassment around counseling or therapy. But many people still do. And I'm aware and cautious that the pendulum may swing too far in the other direction in which every issue becomes something that needs specialized treatment. But even with that danger, I think we can grow as a church in helping provide the counsel and mentoring needed for helping to grow healthy individuals and families. It's not weak to ask for help – it's the weakness of pride to refuse help when it's needed.

Well brothers and sisters, in 2 Peter 3, we are commanded to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He is one who gives the grace to grow and the one who is worth knowing.

Just like we are called to know God and we do so because He has known us. We are to grow in grace through the gracious work of the Spirit of God. He is the one who does the work in our hearts to reveal Himself to us. He is the one who illuminates our minds to understand Scripture and put it into practice. The Spirit of God is the one who provides the growth. So let's grow together! And when the world ends and we enjoy the presence of God in the New Heavens and New Earth, we will say with Peter...

#### **2 Peter 3:18**

To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

Let's pray...

## Lord's Supper

I'm going to invite the band and the deacons to come now as we prepare to partake of the Lord's Supper together.

One of the purposes of the Lord's Supper is that local churches would celebrate together in unity. In 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 10 and 11, Paul tells the church to wait for one another and come together in order to celebrate this ordinance. It's something that has been given for the church to do as a church. And it's a joy to do this in unity with other brothers and sisters!

When we come to this table, we are to examine ourselves. That means that we confess any known sin to God and as far as it depends on us, we are at peace with our brothers and sisters. When we come to partake of the bread and the cup, we are participating in a tangible reminder that Jesus laid down His life and poured out His blood so that sinners would truly be forgiven and made clean.

Because of this, Scripture warns that this ordinance is for Christians only – those who have professed faith in Jesus and been forgiven of their sins. So if you're here and you have not trusted in Christ alone for salvation, I would ask that you heed the warning of Scripture and refrain from partaking. Parents if your children are not in Christ, I would encourage you to talk with them maybe this afternoon about what it is that we are doing here and their own need for Christ.

I will dismiss you in a moment to come and pick up the elements – the bread and the cup. As the musicians play, I encourage you to spend some time in prayer and we can sing together. And in a little while, after everyone has picked up the elements, I will lead us in partaking together as a sign of our unity in Christ.

Let's pray...

## Grow Group Questions

1. How did you first get involved in this group? How do you think others find groups to join?
2. Who could you invite to be a part of this group?
3. Do you feel that your experience in grow groups at Cornerstone helps you follow Jesus? Do you have any specific examples from your life?
4. How could our grow groups do a better job in the following areas:
  - a. Bible study
  - b. Prayer
  - c. Relationships
  - d. Caring for one another
4. Pastor Nathan made three statements about growing together in relationship to groups, classes, and counseling. Do you have any pushback or comments about these statements?
  - a. Being a part of loving community is critical for our spiritual health
  - b. Knowledge about God and His Word will help us remain steadfast against the waves of worldly philosophy in our culture
  - c. Getting counsel and/or mentoring in different seasons of the Christian life is good and should not be seen as weakness
5. Would you feel embarrassed about asking for counsel or mentoring? How could our church make it easier for people to get the help they need?
6. How could Cornerstone become better at helping people grow together?