

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message

August 30, 2026 ***"Beauty: The Beauty of Growth. "Is there a me out there worth working towards?"***

I Intro.

We're moving towards fall and there's a lot going on at NCC. You'll want to keep up with everything that's happening. Stay connected through our social media to keep up with everything that's going on. This is our companion devotional to Sunday's message. It's just a part of all we have to offer to you. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing. We hope you find this tool helpful on your spiritual journey. We don't want you to miss out on anything. We consider you part of our community. We have many ways you can plug into life at NCC. You can find all those through our website, app, and social media sites. Our app is the best way to livestream our services, but you can also livestream on FaceBook and YouTube. You can revisit past services, sign up for events and even give. We're encouraged by your presence when you gather with us. New and familiar faces join us every Sunday. If you join us online, we appreciate your presence. We are fully committed to our virtual attenders. We are your church family. If there is anything you need, prayer, or anything else, please let us know.

II Recap.

We're taking the idea of what beauty is from Dostoevsky's quote from *"The Idiot"*. (1869) ***"Beauty will save the world."*** Dostoevsky had a deep and profound Christian faith. But he saw the religion he grew up with wasn't meeting people at their point of need. Dostoevsky was noticing what was happening in his society, and wanted to address those issues.

What was happening in culture in 1869.

People were looking for something that would explain the mysteries and complexities of life. They were disillusioned, discouraged, seeking anything that would give them direction, guidance and hope. That struggling generation was looking for something to believe in and hold onto. Traditional religion wasn't doing it. So, Dostoevsky was proposing a spirituality, an understanding of God, that highlighted the natural elements of a life devoted to something significant and greater. He called this– ***"beauty"***. Dostoevsky was saying our role, task, was not to push the world into some form of moral conformity. Make everyone do what we think they should do. It wasn't just having people do religion harder. **But to draw people to Jesus by the saving beauty of Christ**. People who were searching, would see in the followers of Jesus, a life that they could find purpose in. Not forcing others to live a certain way. To convince them what they should do. But the beauty of living Jesus principles out in our daily lives. George began this series with *"The Beauty of Generosity"*. The second week we hit *"The Beauty of Purpose"*. The third week was *"The Beauty of Honesty"*. Last week it was, *"The Beauty of Selflessness"*. And today we finish the series with, *"The Beauty of Growth"*.

III Sunday.

We're hitting the final beautiful practice that reflects the nature of Jesus. I want you to read just a couple of lines of the lyrics from the theme from ***"Mahogany"***. If you want to, you can sing it to yourself.

Do you know where you're going to? Do you like the things that life is showing you?

Where are you going to? Do you know? Do you get what you're hoping for?

When you look behind you, there's no open doors. What are you hoping for? Do you know?

You're probably already singing this song in your head now aren't you? GOOD! But what I want to point out is one grammatical issue in these lyrics. Grammatically that phrase is not correct.

Do you want to guess what the correct way to say this is?

It's just supposed to say; *"going"*. There's not supposed to be a *"to"*. The reason I chose these lyrics is because— one, it's a great song...from a very marginal movie. (It scored a 29% on Rotten Tomatoes). Two, this final message is about the journey of life. But it's a journey towards a desired destination. I'll be the first one to say that; *"it's not the destination but the journey"*. That has been how I have lived my life. However, if there isn't some place you want to end up, some destination in mind, some 'there' out there, then you're just aimlessly wandering with no direction. We're smelling so many roses, we've missed what we were supposed to be doing. We're just wandering, doing life, hoping things work out. We may even feel lost at times.

Let me stop where you might be going right now and make sure you don't... 'wander' off. You might be thinking of the phrase: *"Not all who wander are lost."* **Do you know where that phrase comes from? And the context?**

It's from *"Lord of the Rings"*. Here's the entire quote..

All that is gold does not glitter; Not all who wander are lost.

The old that is strong does not wither. Deep roots are not reached by the frost.

This was written about Aragon, (Strider) who was living as a wandering Ranger. It looked like his life had no direction, it wasn't headed anywhere intentionally. However, he was actually training in secret to reclaim his rightful place of king. It wasn't that he was actually wandering without direction. His wandering didn't look like traditional training. So people assumed he was just aimlessly, pointlessly, wandering. He actually had a destination, a goal, a 'there' he was *"going to"*.

The last two lines tell us about the *"going to"* we're considering this final Sunday of our; *"The Beauty of..."* series. The *"to"* you choose, where you're *"going to"*, will help you to mature in a way that can withstand anything that comes against you. You will not *"wither"*. The *"deep frost"*, those seasons of winter, will come into your lives. But your deep roots will be the source of your survival. I have hydrangeas at my house. I had to protect the roots from freezing temps when the plants were young. Now that they're more mature, they're able to handle deep freezes without a lot of extra protection.

This is how Paul talked about having a life of growth, a *"going to"* in **2 Corinthians 4:8-9.** ***"We are hard pressed on every side but not crushed...."*** (You can read the rest of it)

That is the purpose of our *"going to"*. Some who wander are quite lost. We all know people who just have no direction or felt purpose in life. When I was at seminary, I was shocked and disappointed with some other students who were only there because they didn't know what else to do with their lives. They were just wandering. Finishing out this series, we want to help you build a life that's headed to your *"to"*. We want your wandering, maybe an unconventional journey, to lead to a purposeful place. So... ***Do you know where you're going to?***

I want to start with answering the question; ***"Why is growth important and beautiful?"***

The command to grow is non-negotiable. There's little wiggle room in our first passage.

2 Peter 3:18. Rather, you must grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

This verse begins with *"rather"*, which means something important came before it. Peter's message in this letter is life is tough. Things will come at you. The world will try to lure you away from your calling.

In order to fully live into your calling as a follower of Christ...you ***"MUST GROW"***. Peter is saying: in order to survive the world you're living in, to thrive, to get to where you want to go, your 'there', you must grow. And that growth is grounded in, and finds its purpose and energy in knowing Jesus.

A realistic understanding of growth. If we have this expectation a follower of Jesus is supposed to grow, mature. **What does that look like?** Paul reveals his own understanding and some revealing of what his personal growth looks like. And what expectations he needs to have around that growth. **Philippians 3:12-14. I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not yet achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.**

This passage is so full of many different words we need to hit.

1. The 'work' of growth. We understand that this real growth is *"pressing"* and *"focusing"*. Growth is WORK! Growth isn't easy. It's the more difficult way. Even if you are wandering on your journey. You may be taking an unconventional path to your *"going to"*. Recognize there is a work to be done. A pressing on that's an essential part of growth. Paul's life journey took him all over the place. All around the Mediterranean planting churches, shipwrecked, jailed, deciding to separate himself from other spreaders of the gospel he didn't agree with. But in his all over the place wandering journey, he was never lost. He had a firm grasp on what is *"going to"*, his 'there' was.

2. But there are two other important words in addition to the idea of work.

"Perfection"- this doesn't mean flawless or without error or mistake. The Greek word is *"telios"*. It means complete, mature. Paul wasn't trying to be perfect in the never messing up way. Paul in Romans 7 reveals he struggles to do what he knows what he's supposed to do, and can't stop doing what he knows he shouldn't do. Paul was trying to become more complete, mature in following Jesus. ***"Yet"***- this is an obvious admission Paul knows he is still working out some issues, but he is not letting his inability to conquer some things steal his passion. We give ourselves some grace in this growth. It is not continually up and to the right. This does seem to point to a certain amount of *"wandering"*. Paul knows he isn't there. He's still on his journey. But he clearly knows what his *"going to"* is. Paul has a goal, direction. He may be wandering a bit, not always looking like he's crushing it. But he never loses sight of what his *"going to"* is. There is a definite *"going to"* out there for Paul. And that's what's keeping him going. And that's where Paul centers his hope in his growth.

IV Challenge.

So, what should we take away and understand what growth looks like?

Why should we care about growth? ? And why does growth matter?

This next passage is what I want my life to look like. This is the direction I want my life to be *"going to"*. This is where, and who, I want to be when I get to the end of my life. And you might also.

Psalms 92:12-14. But the godly will flourish like palm trees and grow strong like the cedars of Lebanon. For they are transplanted to the LORD's own house. They flourish in the courts of our God. Even in old age they will still produce fruit; they will remain vital and green. They will declare, "The LORD is just! He is my rock! There is no evil in him!"

This should be the desired direction of those of us who follow Jesus

Let me finish this message with some practical things you can do to make growth within reach and fit into your ordinary, everyday life.

1. Have wise, experienced people in your life who can speak wisdom and experience. Everyone needs a guru...or several.

Proverbs 15:22. Plans go wrong for lack of advice; many advisers bring success.

They don't necessarily have to be older. These people are not to tell you what to do or how to do it. But to help you figure things out. It's why we're an elder led church rather than a pastor led one. We need, you need, a collection of wiser voices to think on and pray about things with you.

2. Write down a list, a paragraph, of who you want to be. This is your "going to", your 'there'. Writing things down makes them real, and not just something bouncing around in your head. Don't make it overly long. It's not a term paper. You ought to be able to explain it to someone else in just a couple of minutes. Know who you want to become. Otherwise your wandering will just be; being lost.

3. What will you need to give up that won't help you get there? We are all carrying excess baggage, and things that weigh us down. We need to learn to travel lightly.

What in your life could cause the good things to "wither"?

What are you carrying that would distract you from "growing deep roots"?

This is really more important than adding practices and habits to help you grow. The same way that stopping eating bad things will be as important part of your journey as eating healthy. Again, it might help you to write these down just for accountability.

4. What will you need to add to your life to help you get there? This one is pretty self-explanatory. There are things, habits, practices, you're not doing now that will help you grow.

What will help you grow deep roots?

Our desire as a church is to help you flourish/grow in a life following Jesus. We want you to have a vital, growing, dynamic, life-giving, transformative relationship with Jesus. That will look different specifically for you than it will for others. The things you cut out, and the things you add, will be different than for others. The purpose isn't to get you to do Crossfit, run, swim, lift weights, do aerobics, dance, or anything else. The purpose is to get fit. YOU get to pick what works best for you. This is the heart and beauty of growth. It may feel scary. You're stepping into uncertainty. And we don't like uncertainty. You may have to give up some things that you've just accepted as a part of life. You may have to take on things that you just may not be good at.

Wrapping up this series, there is beauty in: generosity, purpose, honesty, selflessness, and growth. There is beauty in a life committed to following Jesus. It's going to be up and down, back and forth, towards your "going to", and then...who even knows where you're "going to". We're so glad you're 'wandering' with us. But just know...your effort in these specific areas will give you the life you want. They will help you grow.

And your personal growth just might save OUR world.