

**Thursday, September 3, 2020**

**SERIES: GROWING AND GOING**

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**TITLE: Growing in Knowledge and Maturity Pt. 1**

Imagine with me that a nearby town was hit by a huge storm: rain, hail, high winds, and even a tornado to finish the destruction. If you're like me, you're probably curious about what kind of damage a storm and tornado could do, so you get in your car, and you drive to the small town, and you're overwhelmed. You can see that this town is completely flat. Home after home after home is destroyed. But then you have to rub your eyes to make sure you're seeing this right. There in the middle of the destruction stands a house that appears from a distance to be in good shape.

You drive up, and amongst all the chaos and destruction is that house, and sure, it has some dings and dents, but it is solid. It is standing up with no bowing or breaking. If you saw this, wouldn't you wonder what made that house so solid, that even a tornado wouldn't bring it down? Wouldn't you want to know who built it? What materials were used? Of course, you would. And if you're like me, you'd say, "I want a house like that – a house that is solid from its foundations to its top."

As the people of God, we are the ones in society who have the ability to thrive in the storms of life. We have the ability to withstand any success and any failure. We have the ability to survive the greatest tragedy to the wildest windfall. Unfortunately, not all of us are ready for the storms of life. Why? Because many of us haven't built our lives on the things that really matter – the things that will remain. We haven't rested our hope on God, who can sustain us through the storms of life. We haven't been as rooted in Christ as we should be. But the good news is we can, and we can start today. And this is exactly what we want to talk about!

We are in a series called *Growing and Going*. And if we are going to be growing, we want our lives to be like the strong foundation of a house, or like a tree with roots that grow deep and wide. We want our roots to be strong, but we also want them to be connected to the source of life – God - so we can be healthy and producing a life worth living.

Today we want to look at two fundamental characteristics of becoming rooted in Christ: the first fundamental characteristic is growing in the knowledge of God's Word. The second is growing in spiritual maturity. So consider these 2 questions: 1) **Why is it important to grow in our knowledge of God's Word?** And 2) **how do we grow in spiritual maturity?**

Two big questions, but necessary to answer if we are to be rooted in Christ. So let's begin by answering the first question: **Why is it important to grow in our knowledge of God's Word?** We talk a lot about reading the Bible: Intentionally investing in reading God's Word. But often

we focus on the *what* or the *how*, but not necessarily on the *why*. I believe there are three reasons – three cornerstones - that should motivate us to grow in knowledge of God’s Word.

The first cornerstone is this: **God’s Word is God’s blueprint for your life** - God’s Word is God’s blueprint for your life as His child.

Psalm 119:105 (ESV) says, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” You could also read it as “your word is a map to my feet...” God’s Word is our blueprint for life. It brings great clarity on how to live in a fallen world. It shows us how to think as God thinks. It shows us how to think and live as His followers, with each other, and with those who are far from God. It brings purpose and meaning to our lives. God’s Word provides a way of living that is pleasing to God and beneficial for the community we live in. But like any blueprint or roadmap, you constantly need to review it.

Romans 12:1-2 (NASB) says, “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is your spiritual service of worship*. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” We are to daily align our thoughts with God’s thoughts. We are to study His Word so we can know more about Him and His will. When we do this daily, we will be transformed.

When I was a full-time executive coach, many people wanted to know the blueprint for success. They wanted to have a road map. They know you don't get to a destination by chance. They know you have to have a plan. Business owners desire financial success. Parents want to accomplish parenting success. Employees desire to have success in their performance. And the ones that succeed know where they're going, and how they're going to get there. They have a blueprint.

Well, you and I as believers, we too want to succeed in this world. But of course, it's not financial success that we are aiming for. What we're aiming for is a life that brings glory to God. We desire to live a life that is beneficial to the community that we live in. We desire to live a life that does not burn people or burn bridges, but rather creates bridges to Jesus Christ. So if you and I are going to live a life of success - and again, I mean real success – not financial, not influential, but a life of pleasing God, then we have to have the right blueprint.

The problem is, while many of us identify as Christians, many of us don’t *think* or *behave* like one. Why? Because so often, instead of using God’s Word, the Bible, as our blueprint, we use culture to dictate what we think, believe, and how we behave. We opt for Facebook, instead of a Bible study. We opt for Netflix, instead of listening to a sermon. We opt for Ellen Degeneres or Oprah Winfrey, instead of reading a chapter of the Bible a day. We choose 2 rounds of golf, instead of joining a life group. We prefer to read one more tabloid magazine, instead of joining the weekly Bible study. We spend more time with our smartphone than engaging in outreach and evangelism. The result is, we look more like the world than we do Christ, because we don’t let God’s Word be our blueprint for life.

This is foolish. The Psalmist said, “**How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!**”

<sup>2</sup>But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law, he meditates day and night. <sup>3</sup>He will be like a tree **firmly planted by** streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season. And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers” Psalm 1:1-3 (NASB). The Psalmist is saying, you’ll be a fool, if you take your blueprint from the culture: from Ellen, from social media, from *Cosmopolitan* or *People Magazine*. You’ll be a fool, if you form your worldview from Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Hulu. Instead, you’ll be blessed, *if* your blueprint is based on the Word of God. You’ll be like a tree with strong, deep roots. This is why it’s vital to view God’s Word as His blueprint for your life.

Remember, there is a day coming where Jesus will judge. For those who are not Christians, it will be a day of judgment and of condemnation to Hell. But for those of us who are God’s children - those of us who have been declared righteous because of what Christ has done - we will experience the *bema* seat of Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:10 (ESV) says, “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, whether good or evil”

On that day, Jesus will let us know how we lived and what our reward will be. And we want Him to say, “Well done, good and faithful servant”. He may just ask, “How well did you follow the blueprint?” We do not want Him to say, “You fool - you rejected my Word”. So, let’s embrace God’s Word for the wealth that it provides. It is a blueprint for our life.

## **DISCUSSION:**

N: Let’s get a little feedback on this from Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney. Cara, why do you think so many Christians are opting for world views that aren’t in line with the Bible?

C: Obedience, Nat, is the core of all God wants for us and from us. So in Eden, God did not ask for love and faithfulness. He asked for obedience - it’s the one fundamental command - when He says, “If you want to walk with me, do what I say.” Well, Satan, who is he? He’s the father of lies, so he’s going to dangle a lot of that low hanging fruit in front of us, and it’s the same thing he did in the Garden. People still have a desire to want what they want. And they feel like God is holding them - they feel they don’t want to hear *no*. So when the answer’s no, they’re going to make up a God that fulfills what their desires are. They’re just disobedient.

N: So it’s that pen that Christians would have to live in, theoretically - if people were to say *yes* to Jesus, then they would be within a structure. And they don’t like the boundaries that they see. So I think that’s right. I think a lot of people do view Christianity as a bunch of *nos*, but people also forget what Jesus said. He said, *I came that you might have life to the fullest*. And I don’t think people either know that, or don’t know what that means. But when you think about the great level of freedom we have as Christians, it’s really quite remarkable, and it leads to a better life. Now, Arnie, I’m going to put you on the spot here. I would love to know what your thoughts are on this. Because I wonder if you wouldn’t have a different take.

A: You know, as a new Christ follower, I had a friend - I used to attend his Sunday School class. And he’s a leader of a big, several hundred million dollar ministry. We were talking, and he had the view that the Bible was the book of *No*. He’d been a Christ follower since he was five

- Harvard guy, smart as smart can be. And when he was talking about, he knew me as a businessman, and he knew kind of my - where he knew my reputation - and all of this stuff. And to him, it was like, I was having all this fun out there, and you know, he's kind of given it all up for Jesus. And he's been obedient, like Cara was saying, and he did, you know, but here, I had all this fun out there. And now, you know, at a later age I've come to know Jesus. It's like, "Dude, you have no idea what you've missed, if you haven't gone through addictions, if you haven't gone through all this stuff." So he had this impression that the Bible was the book of No. And as a late in life believer, who's done a lot of things - that I thought the Bible was just not relevant - it's the exact opposite. It is the life - it is freedom - because the things the Bible warns you about are really what enslaves you and puts you in that box you were trying to convince us of Nat, where you can't move. And so, it's really - it's freedom - freedom from all the things that totally screw up your life.

N: Wow, yeah, I think a lot of people are right there. And I think the other reason, as I've thought about this question, and thought about what your answer is - I think the other reason why people like other worldviews - maybe even some denominations of Christianity - is because of the structure. I'm not saying the list of yeses or nos, but there's a structure. There's an orderliness that they see. But the reality is, it's just a game of religion. It's just a bunch of - if you do these things, in this order, at this time, this many times, then you can achieve probably whatever the end goal is. And again, that it's that system of manmade religion, and that ability to play God. And I think that is part of the reason why some people reject evangelical Christianity, and move towards other worldviews, because it's all about them, not about what God did for us. So speaking of lifestyles, let's talk about Christians who don't engage God's Word for more than let's say once a week. Arnie, what happens to those people who aren't engaging in God's word consistently?

A: Nothing. And that's the problem. When we look at them over time - and it's not just in the United States, so it's not a cultural thing - but anywhere in the world - those people that don't engage in Scripture, their lives look exactly the same as someone who's an atheist, or somebody who just doesn't care about anything else, or a Hindu, or a Buddhist. Their lives are - there's no difference, no significant difference on - I think it was 16 different behavioral scales. In some that claim to be a Christian, but they don't engage the Bible, there is a propensity for them to be more divorced in the United States, especially, than those that have no claim. And so it's, here again, it's following your notions of Jesus Christ - belief without commitment. So therefore, you would naturally have problems that the rest of the world has. So you're locked into the way of the world, and you're not free. You're bound to the world.

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There's another cornerstone that should motivate us to grow in knowledge. **And that is: God's Word brings life.** God's Word brings life, and as Jesus said, *it is life to the fullest.*

Proverbs 3:1-6 (ESV) says, "**My son, do not forget my teaching, But let your heart keep my commandments;** <sup>2</sup> **For length of days and years of life And peace they will add to you.** <sup>3</sup> **Do not let kindness and truth leave you; Bind them around your neck. Write them on the tablet of your heart.** <sup>4</sup> **So you will find favor and good repute in the sight of God and man.** <sup>5</sup> **Trust in**

the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. <sup>6</sup> In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight.”

What’s this proverb getting at? Do you want to have life and life to the fullest? Do you want to live a life that is all God intended it to be? Do you want to have the least amount of regrets? Do you want to live a life that is so counter-cultural, it’ll be taboo? Live according to God’s Word. When you live according to God’s Word, it brings an exciting and rewarding life. It provides meaning to life. It provides a path that is often full of longevity, peace, and purpose.

Not only does God’s Word bring us life to the fullest today and every day we follow it, but the Living Word – Jesus Christ – provides us even more.

1 John 1:1-2 (NASB) says, “What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life-- and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us...”

Jesus Christ – the Living Word - Not only does He bring us life to the fullest on this Earth, but He also provides us with eternal life. This is such good news, because our bodies suffer, grow old, and die. But our souls will never die. He promises us a resurrected body, in which we will rule with Christ forever. **God’s Word is life for today, tomorrow, and for eternity!**

God’s Word is a blueprint for our lives. God’s Word is life. But **God’s Word also brings coherence to the world around us.** Every world view must provide an answer to 4 fundamental questions: **Origin:** How did we get here? **Meaning:** Why are we here? **Morality:** Is there good and evil, and how can we know? And **Destiny:** Where are we going?

All world views must provide answers. Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, atheism, and so on - They all must provide answers for these questions. From my studies, only Christianity can answer each question coherently. For example:

**Origin:** Is the Universe something that happens from time to time? Is it purely the blind process of time plus matter plus chance? Or is there a more coherent answer?

The Bible says that God created the Universe and all that is in it out of nothing. For something to be created out of nothing, you must have an all-powerful being, who is spaceless, timeless, and immaterial. Who does that describe? That describes the God of the Bible.

**Meaning:** Why are we here? Are we here by chance? Just the product of time plus matter plus chance? If so, there is no intrinsic meaning to life.

However, the Bible says, that in the Beginning, God created everything, and it was good. God created mankind in His image. Now, it doesn’t say He created mini-gods, but rather humans who are made with a soul, in God’s likeness. We are not just matter, as naturalism teaches, but spiritual beings. We have a soul – that eternal component. God made us this way for a relationship with Him, and to bring Him glory. There is a beautiful purpose, according to the Bible.

**Morality:** Is there actually good and evil, or is this just an illusion like Hinduism teaches? Is there an unchanging, objective standard of good, or is it all relative to society or the individual? We said a couple months ago: that is just plain silly and incoherent. To have an objective standard for good and evil, you must have a moral law giver. Again, the best explanation is the God of the Bible.

**Destiny:** Where are we going? Is this life all there is with nothing after? Is there a virtual unending process of being reincarnated, or is there something coming, that brings finality to the evil of the world through divine justice? According to the Bible, at the end of time, there is a judgment. Evil will be dealt with once and for all. For those who reject God's offer of forgiveness by grace, Hell is their destiny. But for those who receive God's grace - they will have *eternal life with Him*.

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N: Let me turn to Arnie and Cara now to compare these views with many of the perspectives we see in today's world. Cara, why is having a *biblical* understanding of our origin so important?

C: I would say it's because it gives us purpose. I want everyone that is listening to know that you're not an accident. And I have to say that, because I've lived half of my life thinking that I was - God made a mistake. So I know that there are some people feeling that way. And we're the handiwork of a Creator God, who fearfully and wonderfully created each one of us. And then He says, He's going to fashion our days, which means we have a purpose. We're here for a set amount of time for a purpose, and you have a purpose, and to know God and to make Him known. So we're physically created in His image to represent Him on Earth, and we're spiritually created in Christ when we're born again. So I think that's super important for everyone to know.

N: That's where an atheistic and naturalistic worldview just falls so flat. There is no meaning. There is no purpose. There was no design. It's all by chance. And so then nothing really matters. But when we know that we are made by God, on purpose and for a purpose - that changes everything. And I think there are so many people I've counseled, so many people who felt just like you felt - that I'm an accident. I'm a mistake. My parents didn't want me. This was not planned. But man, let me tell you, God had a plan and a purpose. And so many of us - because we're off track - we're not walking with God. We haven't been saved. Guess what? We're not actually fulfilling that purpose. Things are off. It's like using my laptop that sits in front of me as a Frisbee. That's not what it was intended to do. It's still there, but it's missing the mark. And so when we come to Christ, He redeems us. He redeems your life, and He says, *you are a masterpiece*. So now let's get to work. And that changes everything. But we know that at the end of life comes death, and mortality has been challenged since the beginning of Creation. So Arnie, I'd like to know from your perspective, as someone who's been around maybe a couple years longer than I have - in the 1960s, there was this big revolution against the perceived morals of the day. So tell us about that time, and how we got to the point where we're at today.

A: Wow, that's - you know, I remember - I think it was a Bob Dylan song, "Think of all the hate there is in Red China. Then take a look around to Selma, Alabama." [*Eve of Destruction*]. And so, yeah, I was a part of the anti-Vietnam, the anti-discrimination, you know - that a lot of

riots people thought that they were progress being made back then. And then you had the Jesus movement that came out of that. And the Jesus movement, I think, was classic proof, that if you have people sold on Jesus without the biblical Jesus, without people learning to feed themselves, that what you have is the Jesus that doesn't exist in the Bible. A lot of these movements came also - back in the sixties is when they took the Bible out of schools, and I think it was '63. And then I think they took prayer out, maybe '67, something like that. And, you know, you can say, "Oh, well, what difference does it make?" Well, I'll say let's fast forward to what's been going on these past few weeks. And I think it makes quite a big difference when people are arguing from their point of view, and not from any kind of moral fiber, whether it's the Bible or anything, but just from their point of view. So it's okay to loot and rob and destroy, because you know, "Insurance is going to pay for that. And really, these people are hungry and need food." So it's - have we come very far? Yes, we have. I think we've come tremendously far, but in the wrong direction.

N: I think what we're witnessing is moral relativism at play. And we're seeing that it is in fact unlivable. We have come a long way. You're right. And we are down the wrong road. And so when we live in a world that says, "What's right for me is right for me; what's right for you is right for you" - The problem is, what happens when they have differing opinions? And it is chaos, it's anarchy, and it's only going to perpetuate. And it's really hard to watch as a Christian, because we know that there is objective truth. We know there is a moral law giver. There's a better way to live, but yet the system is so messed up today, that they don't know up from down, and left from right. And I think we, as Christians, need to be willing to stand up, to speak with clarity, conviction, and also with love, and be willing to be part of the revolution in the right way. But as I think about what's going on in the world around us, as I think about what you just said, well, I also think about the world of COVID-19. And I think in general, it's caused us to think, but do you think it's caused us to think more about our destiny, and about the end of our lives, and how can that help us as we try to reach out in the name of Christ?

C: COVID-19 is a curve ball. I think in the United States, especially, we thought we were hitting these home runs with our faith, or at least getting onto base. And then something like this happens, and I think it tests us, because maybe we weren't as Christ-like as we thought. Well, hopefully, we're growing in our own personal walks with it, and changing those things about us when we fall short in those things. And you know, there's been a lot of prophecy talk lately, and, you know, I just have been asking myself lately, "Do I have what I need for today?" [Hmm]. I think that's a good question, because I do, and I'm not just talking in material things - food and physical - I'm talking spiritual, emotional. I have what I need for today, so don't go too far ahead. And then I asked myself too, "If Jesus was coming back today, would I change anything that I'm doing now, if I knew He was coming back?" And I think that's challenging as well, because are we going to be embarrassed by how we're living our lives? Or are we going to say, "Well, I wouldn't change a thing". So those are things that I think we can ask ourselves and that it all affects our destiny, right? And the destiny of others around us.