



## 3: Grow | Pastor Joe Wittwer | October 4, 2009

### A. Fellowship Time (10-15 minutes)

1. Chitchat. Perhaps offer coffee, tea, or a cold drink with some snacks.
2. Pray (or invite someone to pray) to open the discussion.

### B. Review Time (Read the summary below to the group: 5-10 minutes)

In this series *A Different Kind of Christian*, we're walking through our four guiding purposes as a church. To make them memorable, we use four one-syllable words: Love, Win, Grow, Send. The first Sunday we talked about our first and highest purpose, which is to love—love God with all we've got and love people. Jesus said this is the greatest commandment and the most important thing we can do. Last Sunday we read Jesus' Great Commission from Matthew 28: Make disciples of all nations. As you go, make disciples, baptizing and teaching them. We talked about the front end of this commission, the "win" piece, helping our friends come to faith in Jesus. When we help someone come to faith in Jesus, our work is not over; it's only begun. Now we have to help them follow Jesus wholeheartedly and grow to become all God wants them to be. That's this second half: grow. It takes both halves to make a disciple: win and grow. So we're going to talk about the importance of spiritual growth and how we grow.

#### 1. The importance of spiritual growth.

To be a different of kind of Christian, we need to be growing spiritually, steadily becoming all God wants us to be. What do we mean by spiritual growth?

- Your relationship with God is growing. Your love for God is increasing. You are following Jesus more closely.
- Your character is becoming more like Jesus's. You are becoming more loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled.
- Your relationships with people are becoming healthier. You are loving people more consistently and deeply. You are becoming a better spouse, parent, sibling, son or daughter, friend, neighbor, and coworker.
- Your influence is growing as you use what God gave you to serve others and make a difference in a broken world.

These advances are what we mean by growing spiritually; they are functional maturity for a Christian. Jesus used an interesting phrase to describe the beginning of the Christian life. In John 3 He said we must be born again. When you become a Christian, you are born again; spiritually, you are a baby—a newborn! Growth is normal and expected. You begin your Christian life as a spiritual infant, but if you stay there, something is wrong. Paul scolded the Corinthian church for a lack of growth in **1 Corinthians 3:1-3**; "*Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ. <sup>2</sup>I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. <sup>3</sup>You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?*" This is the goal: to become mature—attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. We want to become like Jesus. God wants us to keep growing, but how do we do it?

[If your group would like to go deeper, here are some additional Scriptures on spiritual growth: **Matthew 5:48, Luke 8:11-15, 1 Corinthians 3:1-3, 14:20, Colossians 1:10, 28-29, 4:12, 2 Thessalonians 1:3, Hebrews 5:11-14, 6:1, 1 Peter 2:2, 2 Peter 3:18.**]

#### 2. How do we grow spiritually?

**Meet together in church & life groups** We put this first for a reason. A new Christian's first need is a family. We each needed someone who would show us how to follow Jesus and help us do it. As Christians, we need each other to grow. Christianity is a team sport; we do it

together, not alone. We meet at church for worship and teaching. And we meet in Life Groups for friendship and spiritual growth by discussing and applying what we're learning.

**Seek God in daily prayer, Bible reading & journaling** You have to invest some personal time in spiritual disciplines. Spiritual disciplines are practices designed to connect you with God and help you grow. Success in any endeavor is determined by what you put into it. You have to practice; you have to train. Paul encouraged Timothy in **1 Timothy 4:7-8** "...train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come." Train yourself to be godly. Read your Bible, pray and write down one thing each time that God has shown you in His word.

**Serve others in our church, community & the world** One of the most critical pieces of growth is serving others. We grow when we serve. We get beyond ourselves. We do what God made us to do. God has given each of us gifts and abilities that He wants you to use to serve others. "*Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.*" (**1 Peter 4:10**) You are to use whatever gift you have received to serve others. Those abilities—those talents—God gave you those so that you could use them to serve others.

**Give to God's work in our church and to the poor** Like serving, giving is one of those things that takes us beyond ourselves. If we spend all our money and time on ourselves, we stunt our growth. If we give to God and to others, we grow. In the Old and New Testaments, the starting point for giving is the tithe. The Jews and the first Christians brought the first 10% of their income to God and then gave offerings beyond that. [Read **Luke 11:42** and **2 Corinthians 8:1-5** together.] Jesus confirms not only the tithe, but the attitude behind it. And the church in Macedonia was a church that got beyond itself. If you give, you grow.

**Share your faith with your friends** When you share your faith, it gets stronger. When you help someone else find and follow Jesus, you follow Jesus better. There is nothing more energizing or exciting than knowing that God is using you to help another person find Him and follow Him. Are you practicing *Find, Tell, Bring*? **Find** someone you love, **tell** them what you know, and **bring** them with you to church.

#### **C. Life Group Questions** (select, revise, and add as desired: 20-40 minutes)

1. What were the four elements of growth that Joe specifically outlined as indicators of our spiritual maturity as Christians? Which of these areas do you currently need God's help in further developing?
2. Read **Ephesians 4:11-16** together. Why is spiritual growth important? What is God's desire for us, the body of Christ?
3. At Life Center there are five actions we encourage to help us all grow spiritually. Without looking back at the outline, as a group can you name them all? Individually, is there one in particular that tends to get you "stuck"? What next step would accelerate your growth in Christ? When and how will you implement it?
4. How do you interpret Joe's statement that "Christianity is a team sport"? What teams for the kingdom are you presently part of, and how do they employ the gifts God's given you?

#### **D. Personal Application** (1-3 Minutes)

- This week, take action on the "next step" you identified to help your spiritual growth.
- If you'd like to hear more on the steps you can take to be all that God intended, you can check out Joe's 2007 series *The Life You've Always Wanted* online or at the info center.
- Continue reading *The Hole in Our Gospel*—refer to the reading plan in this week's bulletin.

#### **E. Prayer Time** (As a whole group or subgroups of 3-4: 10-15 Minutes)

- Thank God for His amazing grace. Ask for His guidance and help in growing into the kind of Christian He wants you to be.
- Pray for the people you know, especially "pre-Christians" who are on your mind. Pray that God will open opportunities for you to serve them.
- Bring other praises or requests to God that came up during the discussion.