

Growing In Grace

God in Corinth

Lesson 4

Introduction

1. Now that we approach our 4th lesson in this series titled, “Growing in Grace”, we are going to look at one of the most important realities that will help us to complete our Vision for 2008. I have titled this lesson, “God in Corinth”.
2. Remember when we read earlier where Paul wrote, “I planted, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow”. Stop and ask yourself if you really believe that passage found in I Corinthians 3:6. Paul then adds that nobody planting or watering is “anything”. God is everything. While he does write that we will be rewarded for being a fellow worker with God, we still have nothing to do with the increase (See I Cor. 3:7-8).
3. This means that no amount of teaching, Bible study, prayer, special classes, or even discipline can change people--only God can! I am not saying that God doesn't powerfully use His people in the process of helping people change, but still only God can change people when they are ready and willing.
4. No plan or curriculum that is designed to grow people spiritually works unless God is in it. We might be able to change physical things here and there, but you will never see spiritual maturity in people as God intended until we intentionally step back and let God work in the lives of others.
5. One passage from our Lord should make this abundantly clear. Jesus said, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). If it is true that separated from Him I can do nothing, then I need not to act like I do everything when I am connected to Him. We bear fruit (grow) because we are in Him. Do you remember who the vinedresser is?...it is the Father (John 15:1)
6. Unfortunately, the message that is quietly conveyed in many religious groups is that you are made right with God by grace so you can go to heaven some day, but right now, it's up to you to grow up to an “acceptable” Christian standard. Often this standard has a lot to do with outward conformity to traditions and man-made expectations rather than inward (spiritual) growth.
7. We are presented with a list of do's and don'ts that apply to changing our outer self and if we are successful, we pass. While I realize that what happens outwardly is a reflection of what is happening inwardly, why aren't we teaching people how to overcome greed, jealousy, insecurity, impatience, fear, or anxiety? Most people are still controlled inwardly by emotions, addictions and lusts...hey but as long as you don't let it show...you pass. WRONG!
8. People need to hear about God in Corinth. I don't just mean that God is among us, but that God is in us. When Jesus came to earth He was called, “Emmanuel” which translated meant, “God with us”. If Jesus left earth and went to heaven then how will God ever be with us again? It is going to have to be through the body, the church. Just as Christ was the exact re-presentation of God, we have to re-present His Son to the world. This is deep...God is responsible for the change in Corinth, but we are His fellow workers. When we work, God works through us. He gets the glory and we get the growth.
9. If we don't accept this, we simply conform outwardly and stay stuck inwardly.

I. Recognizing God in Corinth

A. How do people acknowledge God and what He is doing?

1. When we stop and ask what it really takes to grow spiritually, it is easy for us to say, "do life with God". For those in Corinth, this presents an awkward challenge (Read Romans 8:5-9, 14-17).
2. The problem is that our culture has not had the opportunity to take in the things of the Spirit of God like we have. When we tell others that the missing element in their life is God, they have no idea what that really means. To us it makes perfect sense because we have been doing life with God and we know how much He means to us and just how much He has given to make us who we are today.
3. So, how can we help our Corinthian culture see that they need God? How can we help them recognize the God of heaven and earth and help them to trust and hope in Him?
4. Let me first say that there is no such study or curriculum that has some seven step plan or one week program for creating growth. Why? Growth is relational and it is personal. Even though God is not far from each of us, He is waiting for us to reach out and grasp for Him (See Acts 17:27).
5. If we want the Corinthians to know God, then each one has to see a need, feel the void and want a relationship with someone who can fulfill them. This is where the personal relational aspects of growth come in. People will not change unless there is substantial motivation for it. A God of help in a world of hurt can make that happen, if we will introduce Him to others.

B. How do we introduce God and growth to others?

1. When we proclaim the name of the Almighty from day to day and week to week, we need to make sure that we let others hear our voice and experience our joy. Most of our praise takes place among those who are ready to give Him glory and honor with us. This usually transpires in our assemblies.
2. With the Corinthians hustlin' and bustlin' every day in this noisy, busy, anxiety filled world, God is trying to get their attention, but without our willingness to be His voice, people are not getting the message that God is here and ready to help.
3. While we realize that God is the powerful source behind the life changing force in our world, we know that we are called to be His hands, His feet, His voice and even His expression of love in our community.

C. Connecting God and growth in Corinth

1. Now, think about the way that growth happens. First there is a period where a child is being formed in the womb even before birth (ironically this too is God's doing). Then there is a birth and growth continues. But how do our children grow toward what would be considered maturity? The first thing that must be present is a clear understanding of what a full grown, healthy, mature human looks like. We have to know what to expect.
2. Once we know God and we become children of God, then we can measure ourselves to see if we are getting big like, "daddy".
3. Am I eating right? Am I relating to others in my family in a positive way?

4. If I began to bite and pinch relatives or refused to eat, I would be considered childish and unhealthy. We understand that growing up can be a messy process. Sometimes we have to change a few, what John Burke calls “spiritual diapers” until someone is trained to do what is right.
5. All of growth takes place in the realm of good relationships, where there is love, support and an environment where one can thrive. In life there are friends, coaches, teachers, relatives, and even mentors that encourage, guide and set examples. Why do we think it would be any different for spiritual growth?
6. It is hard to watch a child take their first few steps? We often wonder if they are going to fall. If or when they do (they always do), we are always there to help them up. It is disgusting to watch a child eat for the first few times by themselves. They get about half the food in their mouth, while the other half is smeared on you and the surroundings. Often we will try to assist them by cleaning up their mess and seeing if we can help them finish off what they didn’t eat. The little bit of nourishment that was imbibed by the young child may seem insufficient to us, but nevertheless they grow slowly but surely.
7. You get the point. We have to realize that the people we want to reach are not even babes in Christ. If we don’t approach them in a loving manner they won’t become a new born babe in Christ. We commit what Harold Comer calls spiritual abortion. We kill this prospective child before they even enter life as a child of God. And if we don’t support them in their training after being born again, then how can we expect them to grow? Even though we are not in control of the growth we realize that by nurturing and caring for them that there is going to be growth in time. If we do our part, God will do His part.
8. Even in things like discipline, we must assess whether someone is rebelling against God and needing discipline so that they do not do harm to those in the family, or if this is a toddler trying hard to walk toward the Father that is falling and failing as they learn to trust. We may need to approach each situation differently based upon the circumstances. While some need discipline others just need patience encouragement and care.
9. Dr. Henry Cloud in his work titled, “How People Grow” wrote, “People’s most basic need in life is relationship. People connected to other people thrive and grow, and those not connected wither and die. It is a medical fact, for example, that from infancy to old age, health depends on the amount of social connections people have...Virtually every emotional and psychological problem, from addictions to depression, has alienation or emotional isolation at its core”.
10. We were not made to do life alone. We need God and we need each other.

II. Knowing the God in Corinth

A. Don’t let them worship an unknown God.

1. When Paul preached in Acts 17, he found some people who were religious in every way, but they had an altar to an unknown God. The desire to worship and do what is right was there, but they didn’t know the God of heaven and earth.

2. Paul did what we need to do; he revealed the Creator of this world to his audience and told them of how he made all the men of every nation from one man and that he wants us all to come to Him and find Him. How exciting for anybody that worships an unknown God. God wants to know us and He wants us to know Him? Amazing!!!
 3. If it were not for Paul's loving approach and willingness to introduce God to these people in a way that they could understand and know Him, then he would have been preaching foolishness to them. He first helped them to see that he and the God that he served cared for them and felt that there was something exciting that they should know about God.
 4. While some spurned the message we are told that some heard Paul again on the matter while others did become believers. In a connection starved world, people want to hear that God wants to know them and that He wants to be known. People want to hear that there is a family that they can be a part of that has a loving Father.
 5. First century Corinth had its share of false gods that people worshipped in ignorance. Modern day Corinth is also filled with idols and objects of worship.
 6. Generally speaking, until connections are made with the possibility of knowing God or knowing others who do know Him, no growth can occur. The seed has to be planted before it can be watered and the seed must be watered before it can take root. This doesn't mean that we are giving the increase. We are simply doing the work that fosters the right environment for God to do His work in.
- B. Helping others to know God and grow in Him
1. When people transition from the kingdom of this world to the kingdom of God, they are faced with many changes that come as a surprise to them. They have a new mindset, a new home, a new citizenship, a new law in Christ, a new hope, a new everything (all things become new).
 2. People don't intentionally fail at doing the will of God. Most sincere seekers want to know God and want to please Him. Often the learned behavior of living in and of this world has trained them to be who they are. That is why Paul had to tell "Christians" that we don't go on sinning that grace might increase (Rom. 6:1-8).
 3. He rather told them in Romans 6 that they could not let sin reign in them and control them any longer. They were now servants of God instead of servants of sin. The old ways in the flesh are to be considered dead and now they are alive to God in Christ Jesus.
 4. God knows what is best for each of us. We need to teach people that the epicenter of spiritual growth is giving up playing God so that we can allow God to be God in our lives. Often we do just the opposite. We get stressed, frustrated and angry when life will not obey our will. But if we are to move in God's direction for us and help others to join us, then we have to make ourselves available at all times for doing God's will.

Conclusion

1. This is growth in grace, when we take this lifelong journey toward spiritual maturity with others.
2. We will struggle and so will others that we reach.

3. It is God's job to cause the growth, He is simply asking us to help ourselves and others to get to know Him and grow in Him.
4. If you want to know God and start a relationship with Him today we are ready to assist you in coming to Him in humble submission to His will for your life.