

I'm a Common Clay Pot

I'm a common clay pot and perfect I am not
But the Lord is molding me.
In his perfect plan and under his mighty hand
He is changing me constantly.
I used to tell the potter how to mold the clay.
Now I'm resting on the wheel - just to TRUST and OBEY.
In this earthen vessel there's a treasure better than gold,
It's perfectly free for you and me and can't be bought nor sold
Natalie Berglund

My dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, another shooting of a Black person has occurred once again, and close to our suburban life style here in West Bend. I humbly find myself, yet again, wrestling with the redundant and never ceasing question of “WHY?” Loving and caring God, “Why?” “WHY” doesn't it resonate with any parent that their child has to be fearful of people that are called to serve and protect them? “Why” is it ok that these shooting continues and it doesn't bring all people to cry out – ENOUGH! “Why” is there such disparity in how a black or brown skin toned person in 21st Century America – an America that was established by outcasted people of Europeans countries – are still oppressed, feared, disliked, and mistreated, by people who were also oppressed, feared and mistreated? Why when this country was built by the hard work and sacrifice of all these ancestors, (black, brown, white, indigenous) would one people feel dominance over people that were also outcasted from these countries as well and sent to the same continent to build a more perfect union that all humanity is created equal. Those ancestors have long since passed away, but the memory of how this nation was established is still our story – sacrifice, courage, commitment, working together. Where is the Jesus in our nation today? Jesus that ate and mingled with the sick, tax collectors, the prostitutes, the lowly and oppressed? Jesus that even loved and prayed for those godly people that would conspire to kill him and for one he loved that would betray him for a few pieces of metal. Who are we as followers of Christ in this time when people are looking for peace, justice, understanding, kindness, and HOPE? How are we expressing loud and clear that it's ENOUGH! We are all sinners saved by the loving amazing grace of God. “Let you without sin cast the first stone.” We are not to be hypocrite by looking at the sins of others without first seeking forgiveness for our own sinful ways.

I grieve, oh how I grieve for our country and God's people. We are to be Christ like and be transformed. “In order to address this cultural practice of racial inequality, we have to narrate America differently,” Eddie Glaude Jr. says. (The Chair of Princeton University's department of African American studies) “We have to confront the ugliness of who we are — and who we have been — so that we can imagine ourselves otherwise.” And I would add who God is calling God's people to be.

The global pandemic, the many “endemic isms”, economic troubles, loneliness, isolation, yes all of these and more are devastating our nation and our world. There's this wonderful line from James Baldwin: “How much time do you want for your progress?” As we are anxiously awaiting the arrival of our blessing in just five short weeks, for us the answer for when do we want our progress – “yesterday!” Our hope for our little one's America, is a beloved country in which she will be an “American.” Pray with me that, that will be the future and legacy for all children but capped with the blood of Christ - **PEOPLE OF GOD** as our primary identifier. Pray for justice and peace to shower over our world and as the people of God we will lead the world to a beloved world – loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and our neighbors as the same. A humble prayer and hope from your humble Pastor-Servant-Leader. God bless you all.

Pastor Clarissa

FAT HOG for JESUS - What Does It Take to Grow?

So far, we've explored what it means to be Faithful, Available, Teachable, Holy and Obedient. Today we come to the subject of Growing. And as with the other terms we've studied there is an abundance of material in the Bible when it comes to spiritual growth. Over and over and over we are told that God wants us to grow up. If we were to take a potted plant, pull it out of its pot, shake dirt from roots, leave it on a table – question - do plants really need water and soil to grow? Leave it out and witness how its life is slowly eroded.

The purpose of growing is the same objective that Epaphras (Epaphras - charming or foamy. A fellow laborer of Paul and in some sense his fellow-prisoner (Colossians. 1:7; 4:12; Philemon 23) had for the Colossian Christians. He prayed for them, "That you may become mature Christians and that you may fulfill God's will for you." Col 4:12 (Phillips)

That's what God wants for us. He wants us to grow up. You can circle the word "mature" and "God's will". They are both in the same sentence. It is God's will that you grow up.

Listen to this verse from the Apostle Paul: (Ephesians 4:14-15) "We are not meant to remain as children but to grow up in every way into Christ." Did you realize that God wants you to grow up? *Ephesians 4:13*, until we come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature and full grown in the Lord, measuring up to the full stature of Christ. (NLT) According to this verse, you can define spiritual maturity in one phrase. That phrase is this: Spiritual maturity is being like Christ. Most of us want to grow. Most of us want to mature. Most of us want to be like Christ. Many times, we don't know how to get started.

Seven Basic Habits every Christian needs to develop in order to grow to spiritual maturity:

- ❖ In order to grow we need to eat—The Bible
- ❖ In order to grow we need to breathe—Prayer
- ❖ In order to grow we need good spiritual hygiene—Confession of sin
- ❖ In order to grow we need a caring family—Fellowship
- ❖ In order to grow we need regular exercise—Service
- ❖ In order to grow we need protection—Temptation
- ❖ In order to grow we need to give—Stewardship



It's Time to Do Some Growing!



Growth is the expected result of salvation. It is the most natural thing in the world for things that are alive to grow. Let's focus this week on **GROWING** into FAT HOGs for Jesus!

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, your grace amazes me. I pray that I never get over the wonder of it. Thank You that even as I grow my whole life long, I can never outgrow Your grace. I pray that You transform me into Your image with ever-increasing glory, until the day when my growth is complete and I finally see You face-to-face. It's in the name of my Savior, Jesus Christ, that I pray. Amen.

Monday, 31 August 2020 & Tuesday, 1 September 2020 – Spiritual Maturity Doesn't Happen Automatically

Did you know that you can be a Christian and yet never grow up spiritually? *Hebrews 5:12-13* "You have been Christians a long time now, and you ought to be teaching others. Instead, you need someone to teach you again the basic things a beginner must learn about the Scriptures. You are like babies who drink only milk and cannot eat solid food. And a person who is living on milk isn't very far along in the Christian life and doesn't know much about doing what is right." (NLT)

Our minds are amazing things. Starting at birth, we process countless impressions from our environment and the influential people in our life—parents, family members, teachers, and friends. All this input, whether positive or

negative, helps shape our personality, thoughts, reasoning, and behavior. As we grow physically, we should also progress in regard to emotional and spiritual maturity, but sometimes we get stuck in childish thinking and conduct.

Let's read 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 and 1 Corinthians 13:8-11.

Some of the Corinthian believers had failed to grow up spiritually. They were plagued with divisions, consumed with protecting their “rights,” and overly impressed by the more sensational spiritual gifts. They could handle only the elementary principles of Scripture—what Paul called “milk”—because they weren’t mature enough to accept and understand the significant teachings of God’s Word.

Arrested spiritual development has had multiple meanings over the years. However, its basic meaning is this; a stoppage of spiritual development. Persons should be mature. They’ve had enough time to develop spiritually. But tragically, they’re not! Spiritual maturity is not automatic. It takes time, effort.

Spiritual maturity doesn’t happen quickly either. The Bible says in *2 Peter 3:18*, “Continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our savior, Jesus Christ.” (GN) This indicates a process. It takes time. It’s not instantaneous.

9th grade algebra. The formula for distance. Anyone remember?

$$r \times t = d \quad \text{Rate} \times \text{Time} = \text{Distance}$$

- ❖ That formula means that if I’m going 5 miles per hour, it will take me 1000 hours to cover 5000 miles.
- ❖ That formula means that if I’m going 50 miles per hour, it will take me 100 hours to cover 5000 miles.
- ❖ That formula means that if I’m going 500 miles per hour, it will take me 10 hours to cover 5000 miles.

There are some Christians that have known Christ for 50 years. By now they should be mature. But they are poking along at 1 mile per hour. Or some of them have stalled out. Not going anywhere. Just sitting there, causing a traffic jam behind them.

2 Pet 3:18 reminds us that we are to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen. There is no shortcut to spiritual growth. There’s no instant pill you can take today and tomorrow you’re going to be spiritually mature. It takes time. It takes an intentional pursuit to follow Christ. It won’t come automatically or quickly.

People try a lot of shortcuts. Some people look for an emotional experience, “If I just get this ‘certain experience’, then all my problems will be solved and I will be a mature Christian.” Other believers say, “If I just go to this seminar. If I just read this certain how to become more spiritual book. If I just listen to this Christian audible book. If I just watch a certain online worship service.” Other people say, “If I just keep a certain set of rules, then I could be all God wants me to be.” But the Bible says, no. It’s a continual process. You have to learn to be mature. But there are some skills that you can learn that will help you grow.

O Lord Jesus, how I thank and praise You for the everlasting life that You have given to me by Your wonderful grace and love. May I grow day by day to be more like You, full of compassion and kindness. Saturate my heart with Your love, so that I may love You more with every passing breath - my Jesus. Thank You for Your Holy Spirit, Who is making me become more like You, Lord Jesus. I want to reflect Your grace and Your beauty in thought, word and deed. I ask that I may devote my time and heart to reflect on all You are and all You have done for me, so that You are magnified more and more in my life. I pray that the beauty of my Lord Jesus may be seen and reflected in me. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Wednesday, 2 September 2020 – Spiritual Maturity Will Not Happen Without Discipline

1 Timothy 4:7 “Take the time and the trouble to keep yourself spiritually fit.” Is physical fitness automatic? No. Neither is spiritual fitness. It takes time, experience and suffering. Just like to be physically fit, you’ve got to exercise,

develop some basic habits. That is so very true for your Christian life. The Bible says, “Discipline (prepare; chasten; order) yourself for the purpose of godliness.” It takes discipline.

When you talk about discipline you need to talk about discipleship because the two go together.

- ❖ The Bible teaches that mature believers are called disciples. That’s the term that the Bible uses for a mature believer — a disciple.
- ❖ The Bible teaches that a person cannot be a disciple without being disciplined. In fact, the two words go together — disciple and discipline.
- ❖ The Bible also teaches that the more disciplined, the more God can use us.
- ❖ The mark of a disciple is cross bearing. *Luke 14:27*, Jesus said, “Anyone who does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” God wants us to bear our cross.
- ❖ How often am I to do this? The Bible says daily. *Luke 9:23*: Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. (NIV)
- ❖ What is involved in cross bearing? “Whatever it takes to give Christ first place in your life.”

You need your Bible to develop the habits necessary for spiritual maturity. The Bible is like an instruction manual, without it, life is hard and the road is hazardous. All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right. It is God’s way of preparing us in every way, fully equipped for every good thing God wants us to do. *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

If you have a new car, one of the first things you do is read the instruction manual. Find out how often the tires need to be checked, rotated. Find out how often the oil needs to be changed. Find out how often it needs to be serviced. Find out how fast you should drive it for the first 500 miles. If you fail to do this, you can ruin the engine and wreck the car. Someone has said the **BIBLE** stands for - **BASIC INSTRUCTIONS BEFORE LEAVING EARTH.**

God cares enough about us that he didn’t just plunk us down here on the earth and say, “Do the best you can! Hope you figure it all out! Good luck!” He gave us an owner’s manual. It tells us everything we need to know about Him, about us, and about life. But it doesn’t do us a bit of good unless we read and study it! **Read God’s instruction manual!**

Prayer: Heavenly Father, You have called us to grow in grace, to increase our understanding of Jesus and to develop a close and intimate relationship with You. Lord, this is what I desire to do, and I pray I may come to know You more and more each day. Thank You, Father, for the Bible, which is written to help me understand Your Word of truth, and thank You for the indwelling Holy Spirit, Who has promised to guide me in the way that I should go. I pray that I may learn to walk in spirit and truth so that I may mature in my Christian faith as I study the Bible and learn to live godly in Christ Jesus. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Thursday, 3 September 2020 & Friday, 4 September 2020 – The Bible is like -

The Bible is like a flashlight for a camper – without it you’ll stumble and get hurt, or wander and get lost. Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path. *Psalms 119:105* You’re in a new campground. It’s the middle of the night. You feel the call of nature. You step out the back door of the camper without a flashlight, and bang into the picnic table. Trip over tree roots, fall into the stream. Without a light, you stumble and get hurt or wander and get lost.

Life can be like that. You feel like you’re stumbling, you’re wandering. You’re hurt, you’re disoriented. God didn’t intend for life to be like that. He gave us a flashlight. But it doesn’t do us a bit of good unless we use it! Turn on God’s light!

The Bible is like a weapon for a military person on the battlefield. You need it for protection against the enemy. Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. *Ephesians 6:17*(NIV)

Teachers of bible classes get an assortment of students; those who are eager to learn, excited, and motivated; others who are bored, disinterested, detached, unconcerned.

Perhaps these latter students don't realize that they're in a battle. They don't realize that this book (Bible) is their only weapon that can protect them from all enemies. They don't realize that unless they learn it, absorb its teachings, and learn how to use it daily, they *will be* defeated.

We're in a spiritual battle. If you're a Christian, you're a target. And unless you know how to use the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, you're dead! God never intended for you to be a casualty. God wants you to be a conquering soldier, not a casualty. God gave you a sword, but it doesn't do a bit of good unless you use it! Master the use of God's sword – God's Holy Word!

The Bible is like a mirror for an actor, without it they don't know what they look like or to change how they act. Obey God's message! Don't fool yourselves by just listening to it. 23 If you hear the message and don't obey it, you are like people who stare at themselves in a mirror 24 and forget what they look like as soon as they leave. 25 But you must never stop looking at the perfect law that sets you free. God will bless you in everything you do, if you listen and obey, and don't just hear and forget. *James 1:22-25 (CEV)*

What does a mirror do? Show you what you look like. In this passage James specifies that it is the person who looks and walks away and forgets what they look like. The function of a mirror is to show us accurately what we look like, so that we can make any necessary changes. The function of the Bible is to show us accurately what we look like so that we can make, with *God's help and direction*, any necessary changes.

It's tragic when everyone else knows that Herman gossips, but Herman doesn't know it. It's tragic when everyone else knows that Marybeth has a tongue like a razor, but Marybeth doesn't know it. It's tragic when everyone else knows that Burt's spending far more money than he should, but Burt doesn't know it.

The Bible is like a mirror. It shows us what we're like. It shows us where we need to change. It not only points out the need, it helps us change! But a mirror does you no good unless you use it! Look in God's mirror!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we are called to abide in Christ, to rest in His love, to remain connected with the Lord Jesus and to depend upon Him in all things, knowing that He alone is the true and living Vine, so that our lives might bear much fruit and glorify our Father in heaven. I pray that by the power of Your Holy Spirit, I may remain firmly connected to Christ and willingly submitted Your perfect pruning knife, so that any part in me that is not of Christ, may be trimmed away, so that I may be enabled to grow in grace and mature in my Christian walk. Root out any bad attitude, foolish thoughts or wrong motives that may start to formulate in my mind and which may hinder my growth or infect my spiritual life. Help me I pray, to take every thought captive to Christ, so that I may become a fruitful branch and bear much fruit, to the glory of God the Father. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Saturday, 5 September 2020 – The Bible is like nutrients and water, without them, you'll be starved and withered up.

God blesses those people who refuse evil advice and won't follow sinners or join in sneering at God. Instead, the Law of the Lord makes them happy, and they think about it day and night. They are like trees growing beside a stream, trees that produce fruit in season and always have leaves. Those people succeed in everything they do. Psalm 1:1-3 (NIV)

Let's go back and take a look at the potted plant illustration. It will not look too worse for the wear if it's only out of its nutritional elements for a couple of hours. But if it's left out for a week, just like this, without water, without access to nutrients, would be dead and ready for the garbage.

Here's the tragedy. There are some of you who are trying to live like this. Each Sunday you're trying to get all the spiritual food and water you need for the entire week. You can't do it. It's not possible. It would be like this plant,

putting it in the pot and giving it water and nutrients for one hour a week. What would that do to the life of this plant? What does that do to your spiritual life? Here's the tragedy. Many of you today are more concerned about this plant than you are about your own spiritual life. You're thinking to yourself, "I hope that poor plant survives."

If you're concerned about this plant, how much more should you be concerned about your soul. The soul of those you love and care for? Your soul needs the water of the Word. Your soul needs the nourishment that only the Bible can provide. And you're trying to survive on starvation rations! You only eat once a week, and then wonder why the spiritual life is so difficult! Wonder why you continue to fall into sin. Wonder why you can't make much progress. I'll tell you why, your soul is starving to death! I could have a table set with the most nutritious food imaginable, but it does you no earthly good if you don't eat it! ***Eat God's food!***

Matt 4:2-4 (The Passion) - And after fasting for forty days, Jesus was extremely weak and famished. Then the tempter came to entice him to provide food by doing a miracle. So he said to Jesus, "How can you possibly be the Son of God and go hungry? Just order these stones to be turned into loaves of bread." He answered, "The Scriptures say: Bread alone will not satisfy, but true life is found in every word, which constantly goes forth from God's mouth. ***Eat God's food!***

Prayer: How I thank and praise You for the everlasting life that You have given to me by Your wonderful grace and love. May I grow day by day to be more like You, full of compassion and kindness. Saturate my heart with Your love so that I may love You more with every passing breath, my Jesus. Thank you for Your Holy Spirit, Who is making me to be more like You Lord Jesus. I want to reflect Your grace and Your beauty in thought, word and deed. I ask that I may devote my time and heart to reflect on all You are and all You have done for me, so that You are magnified more and more in my life, so that the beauty of my Lord Jesus may be seen and reflect in me. In Jesus' name,

I'd like to challenge you to take the next step, ratchet up your commitment to the study of God's Word. Here's a list of possibilities. Would you be willing to check at least one of these things, and then do it this new church year which begins September 2020?

SUGGESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL GROWTH

1. BEGINNER

- I will read 5th Avenue's Weekly Devotionals and read my Bible ___ days a week
- I will read my Bible ___ minutes a day, ___ days a week for the remainder of 2020
- I easier, I will listen to the Bible on cassette tape ___ minutes per week this year
- I will memorize ___ verses of Scripture each week this year
- I will buy a different translation of the Bible and use it this year
- I will begin attend Sunday School, Book Study, or Bible Study (dates and times are being set)
- I will join a Small Group or a partner and ask them to help me achieve my Bible study goals this year

2. INTERMEDIATE

- I will practice some new methods of Bible study this year
- I will read a book this year on how to study the Bible
- I will eliminate some non-essential activities from my schedule and spend ___ hours per week in Bible study this year.
- I will study and practice the art of Scripture meditation ___ minutes a week this year
- I will write out my Bible Study objective on a 3x5 card, give it to a friend, and have him/her ask me regularly how I'm doing (for example, "My goal: 15 minutes a day, 5 days a week")

3. ADVANCED

- I will record my insights from the Bible in a journal ___ days per week this year
- I will purchase and use a Bible study book/tool this year (Bible Dictionary, Bible Encyclopedia, Bible Commentary, Bible Concordance, etc.)

I will attend a Bible study group and participate this year

B. SUGGESTIONS FOR FAMILY GROWTH

We will do the Family Time Bible study this week

We will memorize a passage together each week this year

We will read through and discuss _____ books of the Bible this year

We will ask each other once-a-week, "What have you learned from the Bible this week?"