

GROWING IN GRACE
Good News About Grace - Part 9 of 10
Tom Holladay

*"But **grow in the grace** and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." 2 Peter 3:18 (NIV)*

Growth is no ... _____

Growth is ... _____

*"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to **put off your old self**, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to **be made new in the attitude of your minds**; and to **put on the new self**, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." Ephesians 4:22-24 (NIV)*

I. PUT OFF THE _____

"Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved." Matthew 9:17 (NIV)

*"Your hearts should be **strengthened by God's grace**, not by obeying rules..." Hebrews 13:9 (NCV)*

*"Who then will condemn us? Will Christ? **No!** For He is the one who died for us and came back to life again for us..." Romans 8:34 (TLB)*

* Trying to grow by _____

* Trying to grow by _____

* Trying to grow by _____

II. PUT ON THE _____

*"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a **new creation**; the old has gone, the new has come!" 2 Cor. 5:17 (NIV)*

*"Your old sinful self has died, and your new life is **kept with Christ** in God." Col. 3:3 (NC*

* We don't have to _____ our new life.

* We don't have to _____ our new life

* We do have to _____ our new life.

III. BE _____

"Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think." Romans 12:2 (NLT)

"You began your life in Christ by the Spirit. Now are you trying to make it complete by your own power? This is foolish." Gal. 3:3 (NCV)

2 QUESTIONS

Why does it take so long?

Where do I get started? _____

"... He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." Phil. 1:6 (NIV)

"For God is at work within you, helping you want to obey Him, and then helping you do what He wants." Phil. 2:13 (TLB)

*"Everything - and I do mean everything - connected with that **old way of life** has to go ... Get rid of it! And then take on an entirely **new way of life** - a God-fashioned life, a life **renewed from the inside** and working itself into your conduct as God accurately reproduces His character in you." Ephesians 4:22-24 (Message)*

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Oxymorons: diet ice cream, a conservative democrat, politically correct. The top American oxymoron: A temporary tax increase!

How do Growth and Grace fit together? Some things about what growth is and what it isn't as we think about how God grows us through His grace.

Growth is not how many. It's not how many meetings you attend at church. It's not how many verses you memorize in the Bible. It's not how many minutes you spend in a devotion time this morning. It's not how many Christian books you read this last year. It's not a matter of how many. A lot of time we make the mistake of thinking that just because I'm involving myself in what may be a growth producing activity, what may be something that results from growth sometimes, that I'm automatically going to be growing. Many people have thought through the years that if they just attended church more that somehow they would automatically grow. It doesn't work that way.

It's as if I decided I wanted to get more healthy physically. I want to start to work out. I went down to the local health club and brought my lawn chair with me and set it right in the middle of the health club. For about an hour, I watch everybody else exercise. "Aren't they doing great!" I got up, took my lawn chair, got in the car. I felt so good about what I'd done, I got myself a doughnut on the way home. I really felt good about watching those people exercise.

Just doing things doesn't necessarily mean I'm growing. It's not a matter of how many.

What is growth?

Growth is how much. It's the quality of life. It's how much closer I am to God than I was at this time last year. It's how much more I love my wife and kids because of God's grace. It's how much my character is being changed by God's power. It's not a matter of quantity it's a matter of quality. Jesus didn't say, "I came to give you more things to do in your life." He said, "I came to give you an abundant life. A new quality of life." As we've been looking these last several weeks, He gave us His grace. He didn't give us His grace just as a gift to get us started. He gave us His grace as a gift to keep us going.

On the front page of the *Register* this morning is a logo "Orange County Growth". It's not about personal growth. It's about county growth, the changes that are happening around us. Population changes, transportation changes. There's a lot of changes that happen around us all the time. There's sort of a dichotomy between the changes that are happening around us sometimes and the changes that are happening within us. As things are changing more and more quickly around us, for a lot of us, we wish the change would happen more and more quickly within us. We're frustrated at the rate of change within us. We wish it would happen more quickly. "I've struggled with that habit a long time. I wish I could get past that. I wish that fear wasn't a road block for me any more. I wish I could get past that relationship, make it better or get over it." The rate of

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change within you just doesn't come fast enough sometimes. God's purpose in our lives is to help us to change. It's what His growth is all about.

Today we're going to talk about how He grows us. We're going to find out that just being a Christian doesn't guarantee this change. There is a process of growth that God wants to work in our lives. I know some people who've been Christian a long time but haven't grown a lot. Others who have been Christians just a short time and amazing growth has happened. What's happening?

There's a process of change, a process of growth, that God has for our lives that can drastically increase the rate of change in our personal life. If you're thinking you know what it is, that you just need to try a little harder. If you just tried a little harder you could get this thing down. I've got good news. It's not a matter of us just trying harder. That produces a lot of guilt in the end. It's not a matter of me just trying a little harder. God has a process that begins by grace -- it's a gift -- but it also continues as a gift. We grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We're going to look today at a simple three part process He gives us. It's simple but it's powerful. I'd say that for some of you your life is never going to be the same after today just looking at this process of growth.

Here's the process. One of the places it's written for us in the Bible is Ephesians 4:22-24. Listen for the three parts. *"You were taught with regard to your former way of life to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires, to be made new in the attitude of your minds and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."*

Three parts:

You put off the old. The old is what used to be. The old is my life without Christ and everything that had to do with that. Today I'd like to focus particularly on old ways of trying to grow, old ways of trying to make myself better and focus on three of them that don't work according to what Jesus had to teach us about real, genuine personal growth:

1. Trying to grow by doing good. If I could just do enough good things then I'm going to grow. Jesus gave His disciples then and now a great picture of why this doesn't work. He talked about wine and wineskins in Matthew 9:17 *"Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."* Since most of you don't have a wineskin hanging in your backyard we need to talk about this. What's He talking about here? In that day they would pour the new wine into a leather wineskin and as the wine fermented it would expand and the wineskin would expand with it. Outside, the sun would beat down on it and the wineskin would harden, then they'd pour the wine out. If you took new wine and poured it back into that old hardened wineskin it would burst as it began to expand.

What Jesus was saying was this: Sometimes it looks like it will fit, it fits in the beginning but there's no room for growth, for expansion. Sometimes it looks like if I could just do enough good things, I'm going to grow. That will work but there's no room for genuine change in that. There's

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no room for becoming all that God wants me to be. I can't grow just by doing more and more good things. Thoreau called it, "We have improved means to unimproved ends." Just improving the means doesn't improve the result.

So how do I grow?

2. You don't grow by keeping rules. It doesn't happen by doing good and it doesn't happen by keeping rules. Hebrews 13:9 *"Your hearts should be strengthened by God's grace, not by obeying rules."* It's not by obeying rules that my heart's strengthened. It's by God's grace. There is a time for rules. When your children are little, they need some rules. But a thirteen year old needs a little bit more freedom. A twenty- three year old needs a little bit more freedom. If you treated your children like they were three years old, gave them those kind of rules all their life, up till they were ready to go off to college, would they be ready for the world? No way. They need a little bit more freedom all the way along. The more freedom you give someone, the less rules, the more they can grow. Also the more they can make a mistake.

Rules cannot produce growth. They control things, they control people. They might even control myself. But you cannot produce growth through rules. What's the place of rules in the Bible? You might think of grace as the jets that power the engines. The Ten Commandments sort of give us some flight plan ideas, some direction. But the power doesn't come through rules. Rules can't produce growth.

You might think of your life as being in a tiny rowboat in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. You're all by yourself, lost. You know it's useless. You know you're never going to get to land but you're rowing as hard and as fast as you can. You're working as hard as you can to try and save yourself. All of a sudden on the horizon, you see this gigantic cruise liner -- *God's Grace*. This cruise liner pulls up beside you and God expresses His willingness to save you. You were lost and now you're found. He brings you on His boat. What are you going to do on the boat? How are you going to grow on it? What does He have for you to do within His grace? Incredible things. All over the ship. But what we do sometimes is remember that old way of living. We go down in the water, get our old rowboat out -- our old way of doing things. We haul it up on the ship and put it up on the deck. Then we get back in it on the deck and we start rowing again like, "Aren't you impressed with me? Look what I'm doing for You."

God saying, "I've got a new way for you to live. I've got new things for you to do." Another word for this trying to use rules to produce growth is religion. That's what religion is. Trying to make a bunch of rules about my relationship to God thinking somehow that's going to produce growth. It never has worked, it never will work. Growth comes from grace.

3. Trying to grow by feeling bad. Rules can't produce growth and guilt can't produce growth, but we think sometimes, "If I just feel bad enough about myself, maybe I'll get better." If I really heap the guilt on, maybe I'll get better. Just logically, you can see what that wouldn't work. If I feel bad about myself, I don't get better, I just feel bad. We're trying to beat God to the punch. We're trying to say, "God, I know You don't like what I'm doing so I'm going to feel bad. I'm going to condemn myself so somehow You won't condemn me." That's not what God intends to do at all!

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Look at the promise He makes to those who put faith in Him in Romans 8:34 *"Who then will condemn us? Will Christ? No. For He is the one who died for us and came back to life again for us."* When we celebrate Easter, we're celebrating the fact that God does not condemn us in Jesus Christ. God wants to come into our lives, give us His grace, and never condemn us again. If God doesn't condemn us, why do we spend so much time condemning ourselves as if that's going to work, change us. It doesn't change us. This is the great promise of God.

If I don't grow by feeling bad about myself, if it doesn't work just to have a list of rules, and doing good things doesn't cause it, what does?

2. I PUT ON THE NEW.

2 Corinthians 5:17 *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come."* This is a promise for those who are in Christ, for those who have trusted their lives to Christ and His leadership. It's a promise to those who've said, "Jesus, I want You to be a part of my life." It's an incredible promise. It's not just a new list of rules, a bunch of meetings that you have to go to. The promise of the Christian life is the old has gone, the new has come.

A couple of things about this new life that God wants to give to us.

1. We don't have to achieve our new life. I don't have to make it work on my own. Newness is a creation of God. He is a new creation. We don't have to make ourselves new. We just have to put on the new life He's given us.

A lot of times we think we have to do it ourselves. That's how I get messed up. It's as if God came to me and said, "I've got this new life for you to put on. A \$1000 suit or a \$10,000 dress." He hangs it in our closet and says, "Here it is! It's new life. Put it on. Enjoy it." But we say, "I'd feel better if I did it myself. You've done so much for me, I think I'll do it myself." We get over in our scrap heap, get some scraps together and sew (or staple) the thing ourselves. We put it on and say, "God, look at what I've made for You! Aren't You proud of me?" I think He looks down at me from and heaven and says, "Why don't you put on the new life I gave you? It's a gift. I want you to enjoy it. You're released from having to try and sew all that stuff together yourself. I want to do something in your life by grace that you could never do on your own." We don't have to achieve this new life on our own.

2. We don't have to keep our new life. I don't have to hold onto it. Colossians 3:3 *"Your old sinful self has died and your new life is kept [circle "kept"], in Christ [circle "in Christ"] in God [circle "in God"]."* That's pretty safe, pretty secure.

I had an illustration of this last week. We bought a new fireproof lock box to put important papers in. I didn't really want to lock it, just keep it fireproof in case something happened. I wanted a safe place to put the keys, so I put them in the box. Putting the box in the closet, it slammed down on the floor and the lid slammed shut, the lock slammed shut. The keys are inside. How do I get it open? It was embarrassing situation but it did give me a good illustration.

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When it comes to your security, your salvation, your new life that God's given you, the keys are inside, in Christ, in God. You're not holding on to the key, He is. He's holding on to the key and He's never going to give up on you. That the security of this new life that God has given to us. My lock box wasn't as strong as God, and I was able to break in. But nobody can break into God and make the difference.

I don't have to achieve this new life. I don't have to keep this new life.

3. I do have to put on this new life. There is a decision that I get to make, that I'm allowed to make everyday of my life about this new life that God wants to give. I do get to put it on.

Picture it this way: Let's say I have an old coat and a new coat. God says, "I want you to take off the old and put on the new." Before you become a believer in Christ, you don't have the power to do this. But once you become a believer you have the power to make a choice. But we struggle with that sometimes. Sometimes we think, "God, I know You've made some changes in my life but I'm comfortable with the old way of living. I think I'll just try it this way for a while." Maybe I'll make it into heaven now and try to live this way. Once you become a believer you're going to find that the old way starts to become more and more uncomfortable. It just doesn't fit anymore. You've got to get it off.

We get strategies for dealing with it. One strategy is putting the new life over the old life. We've got the two things going and it doesn't work. It really feels uncomfortable. It doesn't feel right.

Another favorite strategy: We take off the old but we're not really comfortable taking off the old so we try to wear both -- a Jekyll and Hyde kind of thing. That doesn't fit.

God is saying, "You've got this old way of living, of talking to people -- take it off. I've got a new way for you to talk to people. It encourage them. Put that on."

For me, I've got to do that a hundred times a day! It's not as if I did that once twenty years ago and done with it now. It's a constant decision. Put off the old, put on the new. Stop talking the old way, start taking in new way. Stop worrying about my money, start trusting God when it comes to finances. Sometimes with the same it's a decision made dozens and dozens of times the same day. Take off the old, put on the new. It's God's new way of living.

If you could look anyway you wanted on the outside, like anyone you wanted, any movie star, any sports star, anybody in the world, who would you choose? Dream your wildest dreams. If you could look like anyone you wanted on the inside, anybody, who would you like to look like on the inside?

We're talking about God's promise: "I want you to look like Me on the inside. I want to give you My character. I want you to look like Jesus Christ on the inside." It's slowly but surely; it doesn't come in a day. Slowly but surely, God changes us. The way Jesus talked to people becomes more and more the way I talk to people. The way Jesus dealt with relationships becomes more and

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more the way I deal with relationships. The way Jesus handled His time becomes more and more the way I handle my time.

There's ups and downs in it. It's not perfect but it's growth and you're moving ahead. That's the process of taking off the old and putting on the new.

Most people struggle with this. Most people say that's tough. "I'd love to do that. It's a great idea. But I have a really hard time letting go of some of those old things. It's hard seeing myself in the new way that God wants to see me." That's why the third step is so important. It's the often forgotten step. We know we have to take off the old. We know we have to put on the new. The empowering step is number three.

3. BE RENEWED IN YOUR MIND.

This step of God, renewing our mind, empowers us to take off the old and put on the new. Romans 12:2 *"Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way that you think."* Circle "changing the way you think". That's where the power is. God wants to change the way we think. A renewed mind. God's changed the way we think so I can see things as He sees them. That's having a renewed mind. The more I can see something as God sees it the more it changes the way I think. If I could see this world as God sees it, really see it as God sees it, wouldn't I have a little more compassion for people? I've often thought if I could just see my sins as God sees them, really see them as God sees them, it would change me. I would see how it hurts me, I would see how it hurts others, I would see the eventual results of it. I would change much more quickly if I could see it as God sees it.

That's what He's saying. What if I could see myself as God sees me? See this new life that He wants to give to me? The great news about this is, it's not a lie. By His grace, He has given me a new life. I'm not talking about pop psychology, pull yourself up by your own bootstraps and see something that's not there so that maybe it will be there. I'm talking about the truth of what He's done. There are some things you may not be able to be.

For me, I'm not a singer. It's something I don't do very well. I sang one solo in one church one time. They came up to me afterwards and said, "Tom, we're so glad you're our preacher!" A couple of weeks ago I was sitting with Rick Muchow in my office and said, "Can we sing this song next Wednesday?" and I sang it to him. He said, "I've never heard that song." I literally dialed my wife up on the phone and said, "Chaundel could you sing that song?" She sang it to him and he said, "Oh, that song." I just don't have the ear for it. It's not one of my gifts. I could try to see myself as a singer the rest of my life and I might get better. But it's not one of the things I'm good at. I'm not talking about lying to yourself, telling yourself you're something you're not.

The truth is, when you come to Christ, He gives you a new life. The more I can see the fact that He's given me this new life and live that new life, the more real it becomes. Becoming renewed in the spirit of your mind. It happens by grace. It starts by grace and ends by grace.

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Galatians 3:3 *"You began your life in Christ by the Spirit. Now are you trying to make it complete by your own power? That is foolish."* It's grace all the way through. A renewed mind is not just determination. It's determined dependence on God. There's a big difference between those two. It's not just self determination -- "I'm going to do this no matter what!" It's determined dependence on God's grace, because that's where the power is. The power is in His grace. You live the Christian life the same way you started the Christian life. You start it by grace and you live it by grace.

Let's say I got on a 747 to Dallas. On the way there, we get up in the air, get up to speed, we're going pretty fast, we get up to altitude and I think, "We're going fast enough. I think I can complete this trip on my own." So I pop open the door and step out, hoping that the speed I've gotten up to in the plane will carry me the rest of the way to Dallas. It's not going to work. I'm dropping like a rock! There's a Biblical word for this. We get up to speed and then think, "God, I'm doing great. Now I can handle it on my own" and we step out of the power of His grace and we drop like a rock. The Bible word for this in the book of Galatians is "falling from grace". It doesn't mean losing your salvation. It doesn't mean you're lost from it. It means you've started to depend on yourself for growth, you've started to take it into your hands. As soon as you do that you start the free fall until you say, "God help me!" and He picks us up again and we have the power again.

That's being renewed in your mind, starting to think about God in a new way. He's the one who empowers our grace.

I know some who aren't believers yet, who say, "I'd like to become a Christian. I'm seeking. I'm considering what it means to be a believer in Christ. But truthfully, I don't know if I can handle all the rules. I don't know if I can handle the rules for the rest of my life."

What I'm saying to you today is the Christian life is not a life of rules. The Christian life is a life of new power. You're living a new way because you have a new power in your life. Maybe you've met some who've been trying to live the Christian life by rules or by doing good or by feeling bad but that's not what the Bible teaches about true Christianity. Real faith in Christ is built on God's grace.

There's two questions people have about this thing called growth that I've heard come up again and again. The first is this: "Why does it take so long? I want to change and I change a little but why is it taking so long?" When something is valuable, it's worth a lot.

Did you read the statistics on the real cost on raising kids in *US News*? How much it cost to raise one child in America today including lost wages and college and all of that? \$1.455 million. Is it worth it? Yes because this is a human life. This is a person. There's a lot of things you can invest your life in but this is worth it.

Yes, it takes time to grow but think of what's happening. Growth is a process that points toward eternity. When God changes your character, it's not for a few months or years, it's for the eternal life He has for you. Because growth is a process that points toward eternity, yes, it takes some time but yes, the time is worth it. The changes that are happening are eternal. They're going to

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effect and impact eternity. That's why it takes so long. God has a long term plan in mind for your life.

The second question that comes up is "Where do I start in this thing of growth?" One word: trust. Start with trust. Start by believing in God's ability to accomplish this growth goal in your life. The motivational power for growth isn't found within you. It's found within Him. The motivational power is this: God wants and is willing and is working for us to grow everyday of our life. The minute I come to Him and give my life to Him, He's working for me to grow. If I had to think, I have to wake up every morning of my life the rest of my life and motivate myself to grow, that gets discouraging. Every morning of my life. But the truth is, whether I feel motivated that day or not, God is motivated. And He's going to motivate me. He's going to strengthen me. I trust in what He's doing. The motivation comes from the power of God that works within you. You just have to cooperate with what He's already doing. Doesn't that make you relax a little in His grace? One of my goals this morning is we relax in His grace.

Growth is not accomplished by trying hard. It's accomplished by trusting Him. That's where growth comes from. He's trustworthy.

There's two unforgettable promises from the book of Philippians about how we can trust God to grow us once we come to Him as Christians. Those of you who are Christians and you're thinking, "Is He going to keep working in my life?" Philippians 1:6 says "*He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*" That's a promise. Others of you may not be a believer yet. You may be thinking, "If I come to Him I don't know if I can make it. I don't know if I can keep up my end of the bargain." And you feel like you're going to be all alone in that. Philippians 2:13 "*For God is at work with you, helping you want to obey Him and then helping you do what He wants.*" I love that promise! Not only does He help me want to do the right thing, He helps me do the right thing. It's not that I never want to do the wrong thing because I do and you do too. But God's never going to give up on helping us do the right thing. That's what grace is all about.

You might think of it this way when it comes to renewing your mind and starting to trust God in a new way for growth. It's as if God wants to do a giant restoration project in our brains, in the way we think about Him and about growth. It's tough when you remodel. Chaundel and I have done a number of remodeling projects. One time we remodeled a house that had been built in 1885. There was a lot of work involved. When I first walked into this house, it didn't look like a lot of work. But what I didn't realize was the greatest work were the things you don't see -- wiring, foundations... To really get that done it's a lot more work sometimes than it looks like at first.

That's the same thing that God does in our lives. He comes into our lives. We say, "I've got a wall over here. I need You to patch the wall. If you could just do that for me then I'll be fine." God says, "No, no. I've got a lot bigger plans for you than that. I want to get the wiring. That's where I want to get to." But to get to the wiring, what do you have to do? Tear all the stuff off the wall and that gets discouraging. It actually starts to look worse before it starts to look better. I just wanted God to do this little tiny thing and it seems like more is happening. Why is He doing that? Why does He want to get to the wiring? Because He wants to change the power source of

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our lives. He wants to give us more power than we ever imagined. Why does He want to get to the wiring? Because He sees the danger that's there that someday that something is going to blow up in our face. He wants to get to it and change us now. So God tears away at the walls, He gets to the wiring, then He puts the walls back up. That's God's giant restoration project in our lives. He's not going to give up.

Today, what I want to close with is an opportunity for you to say to Him in prayer, "God, I'm in. I want to be a part of this. Would You do Your restoring work in my life for the rest of my life?"

Prayer:

Let me encourage you just to tell Him that to refresh that commitment or for many of you to make that commitment for the first time. Make a deal with God. "God, today I'm making myself available for Your restoring work. I pray that You'd help me to not just patch over the problems myself but to trust You, to make of me something that only You can do. Lord, when I'm afraid help me to remember that the old dilapidated house that I've grown accustomed to, it may have to undergo some drastic changes as You're making a mansion of me. But Lord, You're willing to make of my life something I never dreamed possible. I have big dreams but You have bigger dreams. God, would You do Your restoring work in me? Help me to think in a new way, to put off the old and to put on the new. In Jesus' name, Amen."

Before I read the last verse, let me give you your homework. Instead of saying, "I'm going to apply this to all the areas of my life this week." I'd like you to choose one area of life that you apply this to this next week. When you remodel a house, it's best to do one room at a time. Choose just one area. Maybe it's the way you talk to your kids, maybe it's the way you think about your finances, maybe it's the way you're doing business. Choose one area. That's the area to ask God to help you to put off the old and put on the new this next week.

"Everything and I do mean everything connected with that old way of life has to go. Get rid of it! And then take on an entirely new way of life, a God-fashioned life, a life renewed from the inside and working itself into your conduct as God accurately reproduces His character in you."