

Growing in Christ-like Character

I. Introduction

Wayne Grudem defines sanctification like this: "A progressive work of God and man that makes us more and more free from sin and like Christ in our actual lives" (*Bible Doctrine*, pg. 326).

"We are all tempted to oversimplify. We long for one key truth, a secret principle, the foolproof technique, some life-changing experience that makes everything different from now on. If only there were some one thing to make Christian growth certain! But there is no single key" (David Powlison, *How Does Sanctification Work?* pg. 23).

II. Growing love for Christ (John 8:42).

- "Jesus said to them, 'If God were your Father, you would love me' . . ."

A. Abide with Christ (John 15:4-5).

B. Increasing desire to know Christ (John 17:3; Philippians 3:8).

C. Growing satisfaction in Christ (John 4:13-14; Revelation 21:6).

III. Sightedness – help people to see because sin blinds (Psalm 139:23-24; Hebrews 3:12-13).

A. It is important that we regularly search our hearts (Psalm 139:23-24).

B. Sightedness is the product of community because sin blinds (Hebrews 3:12-13).

C. It is very difficult to change if we don't know what motivated a particular behavior.

- One man I counseled years ago was a compulsive liar and he would get so frustrated with himself after he told a lie.
- Once he was able to see that his lies were motivated by a desire for acceptance, he was able to repent of his lies and recognize he was accepted by God because of the finished work of Christ on the cross. He did not need to prove himself or impress others to be accepted by God.

IV. Conviction leading to repentance.

A. One of the evidences of a person being a Christian is that he or she is convicted by sin (John 16:8).

B. The proper response to this conviction then is to turn and go in a new direction (Proverbs 28:13).

C. What does conviction and repentance look like in action? *Repentance is a change of mind that leads to a change in action.*

1. Read Luke 3:8-14.

- a. Share what you have (v. 11).
- b. Tax collectors – don't collect more than you are authorized (v. 13).
- c. Soldiers – do not extort money by threats or by false accusation and be content with your wages (v. 14).

2. Ephesians 4:22-32 (put off, be renewed in your mind, put on).

- a. Put off falsehood and speak the truth (v. 25).
- b. Stop stealing and start working and share with those in need (v. 28).
- c. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouth but instead speak words that build up and give grace to the hearer (v. 29).
- d. Put away bitterness and put on forgiveness (v 31-32).

V. Meditation (Psalm 19:14; Josh 1:8; Lk 6:43-45; 2 Cor 10:4-5; Col 3:2, 16; Romans 8:5-6).

A. The Importance of Meditation

1. Joshua 1:8

2. Psalm 19:14

3. "Meditation is the activity of calling to mind, and thinking over, and dwelling on, and applying to oneself, the various things that one knows about the works and ways and purposes and promises of God. It is an activity of holy thought, consciously performed in the presence of God, under the eye of God, by the help of God, as a means of communion with God" (J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*).

4. 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 – "For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. ⁵ We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ."

5. Luke 6:43-45 – “⁴³ “For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, ⁴⁴ for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. ⁴⁵ The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

- Matthew 9:4 – “why do you think such evil in your hearts.”

B. What should we be meditating on?

1. The character and works of God (Psalm 145:5).

- a. His grace (Romans 5:20).
- b. His love (Romans 5:8).
- c. His power (Psalm 115:3).

2. The promises of God.

- a. He will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).
- b. He has sealed us for the day of redemption (Ephesians 1:13-14).
- c. He is preparing a place for us so we can be with Him (John 14:1-6).

3. Our identity in Christ.

- a. We are children of God (John 1:12).
- b. We are royalty (1 Peter 2:9).
- c. We are friends of God (John 15:15).

VI. The Christian life is to be lived in community.

- A. Ephesians 4:15-16
- B. Proverbs 18:1
- C. Galatians 6:2

VII. Radical amputation.

- A. Matthew 5:27-30
- B. Luke 6:46

C. Romans 8:5-6

VIII. Putting it all Together – in response to what I have shared, let me simplify a basic game plan to help you apply what we have discussed so far (an overview of the book *Habits of Grace* by David Mathis).

A. Hear His Voice (The Bible)

1. Martin Luther said is best many centuries ago, “Let the man who would hear God speak read Holy Scripture.”
2. I cannot tell you how many people I have worked with who said, “God told me . . .”
3. “At the end of the day, there is simply no replacement for finding a regular time and place, blocking out distractions, putting your nose in the text, and letting your mind and heart be led and captured and thrilled by God himself communicating to us in his objective written words” (David Mathis, *Habits of Grace* pg. 45).
4. Bible intake is the key, whether you read a lot of chapters or a few verses that you contemplate and meditate upon.
5. Deuteronomy 8:3; Joshua 1:8; Colossians 3:16

B. Have His Ear (A Life of Prayer)

1. “Prayer, for the Christian, is not merely talking to God, but responding to the One who has initiated toward us. He has spoken first. This is not a conversation we start but a relationship into which we have been drawn. His voice breaks the silence. Then, in prayer, we speak to the God who has spoken” (David Mathis, *Habits of Grace* pg. 94).
2. Devotions & talking with God throughout your day (Romans 12:12; 1 Thess.5:16-18).
3. “The great purpose of prayer is to come humbly, expectantly, and – because of Jesus – boldly into the conscious presence of God, to relate to him, talk with him, and ultimately enjoy him as our great Treasure” (David Mathis, *Habits of Grace* pg. 95).

C. Belong to His Body (Live in fellowship with your church community)

1. Ephesians 4:11-15
2. Proverbs 27:17
3. Proverbs 18:1
4. “When the desire to avail yourself of hearing his voice (in the word) has dried up, and when your spiritual energy is gone to speak into his ear (in prayer), God sends his body to bring you back. It is typically not the wanderer’s own efforts that prompt his return to

the fold, but his brothers' (James 5:19-20), being to him a priceless means of God's grace – the invaluable backstop" (David Mathis, *Habits of Grace* pg. 148).

IX. Small Group Discussion Questions

- A. What did you hear in this talk that was most helpful or encouraging?
- B. What practice or habit or discipline has been most effective in helping you grow in Christ-like character?
- C. Share an example of how another brother or sister in Christ was influential in you growing in Christ-like character.
- D. Look at the list of helpful practices – which one do you want to focus on in the coming days to help you take steps of growth?

The Most Helpful Things I Practiced to Help me Grow (consider this as an appendix to refer to)

- A. Read the Scriptures daily (360+ days per year) to build a foundation for growth (John 17:17).
- B. Memorize the Scriptures to fight against sin (Psalm 119:9-11).
- C. Meditate on Scripture throughout your day – continually to get to know God, not just know about Him (Joshua 1:8-9; John 17:3).
- D. Remain teachable – read books, listen to sermons and take notes, go to conferences.
- F. Only Jesus Christ can satisfy my thirsty soul (John 4:13-14). *In other words, Jesus Christ is the Great Treasure . . . not a successful life or career or friends, etc.*
- G. Listen to Christian music frequently to help you to worship God - Psalm 33:1 – "Sing joyfully to the Lord you righteous, it is fitting for the upright to praise him."
- H. Listen to my best friend (my wife) when she confronts me -and repent (Hebrews 3:12-13).
- I. Develop a life of prayer – not just a quiet time (Romans 12:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).
- J. Teach/Disciple (as you are encouraged by church leaders) – preparation sharpens me tremendously and forces me to prepare consistently (2 Timothy 2:15; Hebrews 5:14). *Look for an individual or individuals who are younger spiritually and encourage them.*

