

All Disciples Grow (Part 1)

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Preacher: Brett Sanders

[0:00] Amen, amen. Children, we are ready for Children's Church at this time. You may make your way to the back. Thank you so much, Praise Team, for leading us so well in worship. We thank you for using your talents, your gifts, but also just the message that we get to proclaim. Thank you, Jesus, for the blood, the difference that a relationship with the Lord makes, and I am so thankful for that today.

Today, we're in week three of our discipleship pathway, and in this pathway, we've seen several different things. The last two weeks, we've talked about Disciples Know. Today, we're going to be talking about Disciples Grow, and that's going to be next week as well.

And then we're going to spend two weeks on Disciples Show, and two weeks on Disciples Grow. And I feel like for many of us, this Disciples Know and a little bit of Disciples Grow is where we spend most of our Christian lives.

We understand the fact that we understand the fact that as disciples of Jesus, we understand that there should be a little bit of growth that goes into that, but many times, this is where we stay. This is kind of where we plateau off as believers.

But what I hope that we're going to realize is the fact that as disciples of Jesus, we should be growing. This isn't something that should be for a few believers. This isn't something that once you check that box off that you've grown a little bit.

[1:28] Once you've completed reading the Bible one time, then you can just check that box off. But no, this is something that we continue to grow in. This is something that we all do. We grow deeper into the gospel. We grow in our understanding of God.

We grow in our dependence. We grow in our relationship with Christ. So many ways in which as believers, we grow. Well, tonight, as you've already heard, we're going to have a night of prayer and praise. And it is my hope and prayer that it will also be a night in which we grow. Prayer and praise are always a great place to start when it comes to growing in our relationship.

But tonight's going to be a little different as well. Yes, it is a night of prayer and praise, but it's going to be a little different. What we've recognized is that God has blessed this church and blessed us in many, many ways.

And in one of those ways in which he's blessed us, he's blessed us financially. He's blessed us to have the ability to put us in a position to be very close to paying off a large renovation before we even step foot into it.

He's blessed us to be able to build our sinking fund, to be able to pay for a major unforeseen expense that a church this old and this size that will have from time to time.

[2:52] He's blessed us to be able to build and provide in our general fund, building it to a comfortable level to the point where we were able to set aside two \$50,000 commercial papers that have been drawing interest for over a year now.

And I firmly believe that God, as God blesses us, his desire, his want for us is to be a blessing to others. It's not just to keep all of this here for ourselves, but it's to be a blessing to others.

In Matthew 6, 19 through 21, Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount says this. He says, As believers, as a church full of believers, we take scripture very seriously and want to invest well.

Part of investing is making sure that we're able to do the things that God has called us to do right here in these facilities. And I believe that we are in a great position to be able to do that.

But also, investing well in God's eyes is investing in the kingdom. This passage also tells us how we invest our treasure, where we place our treasure, will also determine the direction of our heart.

[4:22] It will determine where we go with our heart for Christ. That being said, in a deacons meeting a couple of months ago, the deacons unanimously voted to take those two commercial

papers and the interest that they have been accruing and give it to missions.

50,000 plus some interest will be given to international mission partnerships that we have all over the world. And 50,000 plus the interest will be given to North American missions.

This could be a church right down the road. This could be a church on the other side of the country. It could be any number of things. The money is designated for missions. But tonight, as a church, we're going to come together and pray.

We're going to come together and pray and ask the Lord to give us wisdom and guidance and direction to best use these gifts in a way that will invest well in the kingdom of God, to invest well in missions right here in our community, across this nation, and across the world.

And so I want to encourage you to come back tonight, celebrate with us what God has done, celebrate and anticipate what God is going to do with these, and pray for wisdom, guidance, and direction.

[5:38] And so it's a night of prayer and praise absolutely all the way around for what God has done and what he continues to do. That being said, one of the ways in which we are able to grow and able to follow God and his leading and his guiding and his directing is keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus.

This should be something that sets us apart from everyone else. That as believers, we have our gaze, we have our eyes fixed on Jesus. And as others look to our lives, they're going to see something that is different about us.

And about a week from now, Catherine and I, along with a number of other people from this church, and then also a church in Alabama, will be traveling to Greece following in the footsteps of Paul.

And we're very much looking forward to this and anticipating this. But one of the things that always happens to me, and I don't know if this happens to you, but one of the things that always happens to me when I travel somewhere is inevitably somebody's going to say, where are you from?

Where are you from? And usually for me, it happens when I open my mouth. Because looking at me, I could be from a lot of different places. I could be from all over. But usually, when I open my mouth, there's just something about this ever so slight, hardly noticeable southern drawl, just a little bit, that shows them he's not from around here.

[7:02] And so the next question that they'll inevitably ask is, where are you from? Where are you from? And as believers, we should be living in a way that other people are going to look at our life and say, there's something that's different about you.

I want to know more about what is different about you. It should be obvious. And so in our passage today, we're going to read about this. Our passage today, as clearly as anywhere in Scripture, reminds us of the fact that we should be living differently.

And so I want to encourage you, if you have a copy of God's Word, to open with me to Colossians chapter 3. And we're going to read the first 17 verses together. But this is a beautiful picture of what it means to not only have a relationship with the Lord, but also what it means in our life as we live out of this relationship.

So listen to these words. It says this. It says, It says,

As we begin to look at this, as we see this, it should be obvious from our passage today that I want us to clearly see the importance of the fact of having a relationship with the Lord and what it changes in our life and all the different ways in which it plays out in our life.

[10:27] And so from this, I want us to very clearly and up front see something that should be obvious from this text. And it is this. Disciples of Jesus grow.

And it's pretty simple. It's what our whole next part of our discipleship pathway is based on, is that disciples grow. Disciples of Jesus grow.

So previously, in the end of Colossians 2, Paul is stating the futility of trying to live for yourself, of trying to gain a right standing before God by doing it on your own, by living a certain way.

We clearly see that we don't gain a right standing before God based on our works. But what we also see is that from a right standing before God, from a right standing with God, works are going to be a part of who we are.

They're going to be a part of the Christian life. And so Paul says here in chapter 3, If then you've been raised with Christ, then seek the things that are above.

[11:30] If you've been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above. I think Paul is trying to communicate a cause and effect relationship here. If you're a believer, if you are a Christian, if you

are a disciple of Jesus, then you will be growing.

If you have been raised with Christ, then seek the things that are above. What are the things that are above that we're to be seeking? You know, are we to seek the throne of God?

Is this some kind of heavenly furniture that we're trying to be seeking in this world? Obviously not. It's not those things. But what we're going after, the things that we're seeking are His character, His presence, His heavenly joys.

We're not simply seeking a place or a thing, but rather the one who dwells there. In addition to this, this is not something that we simply do once and we forget about.

The verb here, seek, is in the present imperative, which means that it is something that we do, but in addition to doing it, it's something that we keep on doing. And so we're seeking, we seek, and we keep on seeking.

[12 : 41] If then you've been raised with Christ, you seek the things above, but you keep on doing this forever and as long as you live, you keep on doing this. You continue to seek.

This means that we focus on these things. It means we think about them. It means we value them. It means we prioritize them in our life.

I don't think there is a believer in the room who would disagree with the fact that we should set our minds on the things that are above. There's not a believer who would say, you know what, it's great to know God, and yeah, you want to think about some of those things, but it's not really that important.

I don't think anybody would actually say that. However, I do think that we are all guilty at times of disagreeing with that statement with our actions.

We know that we should be seeking the things that are above. We know that we should be fixing our minds on these things. We know that we should value them, prioritize them, but yet with our actions, we don't always do that.

[13 : 41] We say we follow Christ. We say we are focused on the things that are above, while our lives and actions beg to differ. We say that we have put to death the old self, but secretly, many times we keep it alive and well.

We keep it alive in our lives, and we don't put it to death. And for many of us, as believers, what this means for us in our life is that we put to death those sins that are visible.

We put to death those sins that everybody else can see, while we keep alive those secret things that we think nobody else knows about. And so, as believers, we must understand, if you've been raised with Christ, then our lives, not just part of our lives, not just several compartments of our lives, but all of our lives are focused on the things that are above.

Think of it like this. One of the things that I have really enjoyed here lately over the last few years is not only watching Jacob play football, but hearing about practice and all these things.

And I think part of the reason that I enjoy it is because it brings back memories in my mind. It brings back those fun times in my mind, you know, those really fun times where it's 95 degrees and as humid as it can possibly be outside.

[15 : 00] And so, as soon as you put your pads on, you walk outside and you immediately start sweating. And so, it's in the middle of summer and so you're doing all of these things and you make your way to the practice field, which has grass and dirt on it.

Now, they have the field, which is turf and it's great. But at that time, you know, it was just grass and a bunch of bare spots where we've really worn it out. And so, as soon as you start practicing, this sweat builds up and you just have grass and dirt and mud that just sticks to you everywhere.

And you just have this shirt on that gets so soaking wet with sweat and the water that people mess around spraying on you and all of those other things. And it's just getting nasty.

And so, after practice, you have one thing on your mind. Go get a shower. At least that's what I like. I could not wait to go get a shower. And so, you make your way to the locker room and you peel this shirt off.

And I say peel because that's the only way to describe it. I mean, it's stuck to you everywhere. And you're trying to just peel it off of you and it just plops down when you drop it down on the ground. I know this is gross, but bear with me, okay?

[16 : 04] And it just plops down. And so, you make your way to the shower and you're there and you just stand there until you see the stream of grass and dirt and mud stop flowing to the drain.

And then you start soaping up. And then you see more grass and mud and dirt just flowing to the drain. And finally, all of that stops and you make your way out. And can you imagine at this point, you go back to your locker and you pick up that nasty shirt that you just peeled off.

And you get your buddy to help you put it on because you can't put it on anymore because it's so sticky. And you get them to help you. But that would be gross, right? That's something that none of us would do. Yet, many of us as believers often clothe ourselves with sinful behavior that does not fit with our purified identity in Christ.

We say we have put off our old self. We say that we've put it to death and we're putting on the new self. And so we must understand what this means. By God's grace, our sin has been cleansed through the atoning work of Christ.

Not our actions, not anything that we have done, but by the atoning work of Christ. And we've been called to put on or to clothe ourselves with the things of God.

[17 : 22] And so this morning, I hope we see the importance of growing. The importance of growing in that relationship with God. If we've been cleansed, then we begin to spend our lives putting on the things of God.

What Paul begins to show us is that following Christ and growing in that relationship means that there are things we are to stop doing. But at the same time, there are the things that we are to start doing.

In other words, there are things that we put off and things that we put on. And so the next thing that I want us to be able to see clearly from this passage is that disciples of Jesus grow by putting off sin.

Disciples of Jesus grow by putting off sin. Colossians 3, 5 through 11 says, Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self.

With its practices and have put on the new self. Which is being renewed in the knowledge and after the image of its creator. Here there is no Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised.

[18 : 54] Barbarian, Scythian, slave and free. But Christ is all and in all. Now we obviously don't have time to look at every single sin that is being talked about in this passage.

We don't have to go through and list out exactly what Paul means when he says these things. I think that we can understand most of it ourselves. And it's not intended to be an all-inclusive list here.

But it's helping us see what we should be putting to death. And so Paul is clear here. While not intending to give us every single sin that has ever been committed by a believer.

He does want us to be mindful of some dangers. And one of those dangers that he wants us to be very mindful of here we see is sexual sin. The term sexual immorality typically refers to any type of sexual sin.

And these first five things that he lists all have to do with sexual sin. And so this is something that we typically don't talk about a lot.

[19 : 58] And we try to ignore. But clearly it was a problem for this church and for the people that Paul was writing to. And statistically and all of the research shows that it is still a problem today in churches all over the world.

Sexual sin, especially when it comes to things like pornography, It's easy to convince ourselves, well it doesn't affect anybody else. It's easy to try to communicate and tell ourselves that, well this is really only bothering me.

This is really only something that I'm dealing with. But here's the truth of the matter. Sin always affects others. It may start in our personal lives where nobody else is aware of it.

But it never stays there. It never stays there. It always tries to find a way out. We must proactively put sexual sin to death.

But Paul goes on to share all kinds of other sin as well. He says anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk. We must continually be focused on things above and continually be putting these things to death.

[21 : 12] And so while we see there are many things that the believers must be putting off, must be taking off, must be putting to death in their life. What we also see next is that disciples of Jesus grow by putting on love.

Disciples of Jesus grow by putting off sin, but they also grow by putting on love. They grow by putting on love. It says, put on them as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved.

Put on compassionate hearts. Kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another. And if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other as the Lord has forgiven you.

So also you must forgive. And above all these, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you are called in one body.

And be thankful. Based on what God has declared you to be, we are to live accordingly. You see, as believers, when we accept Christ as our Lord and Savior and receive this atoning sacrifice, we are declared to be righteous.

[22:27] God sees you not as your sinful self, but he sees you as his righteous and perfect child. You've been clothed with Christ's righteousness. You've been declared to be righteous.

Now our lives are to become what God has declared us to be. And as God's children, we see right here that we are to be compassionate. We should have a heartfelt mercy toward others that reflects Jesus' concern for people who are hurting.

We open our eyes and we open our hearts to needs that are around us. We begin to look around and see how we can step in and meet needs. It becomes so easy to be focused on ourselves.

And I think this is part of what it means to put to death the old self and put on the new self. Part of compassionate hearts is putting to death this need that we think everything is about us.

And we put on these compassionate hearts where we open our eyes. We open our hearts to needs that are around us in our community and around the world. But we also see that as children, we are to be kind.

[23:37] We should be thoughtful and considerate of others, even when there is no hope of being repaid for our kindness. Scott Paye says it like this. He says, As those who have been rescued by God's undeserved kindness toward us in Christ, we should adorn ourselves with the same caring posture.

As God's children, we should be humble, it tells us. We should clearly see who we are and count others as more significant than ourselves. As believers, we should be humble and clearly see who we are, the sin that we have been forgiven, and then show humility to others and put others' needs above our own needs.

As children, we are to be meek. We are to be teachable. We are to be obedient to what God has called us to do. As children, as God's children, we are to be patient. This is the easiest one of all, right?

Patience is easy. I've hit a stage in parenting where patience just comes naturally to me. I mean, we started school back. They love getting up in the mornings, love teaching Jacob to drive, love doing all of these things.

Patience just flows out of me right now. It's something that's easy. No, of course not. This is hard for us. But may we clearly see the patience that our heavenly Father has for us, and then show others that same kind of patience.

[25:05] At the heart of all of this is love. Love is always the center of our Christian walk. Love is the evidence of our salvation. It is the testimony of the gospel in our lives.

It expresses our love for God and our understanding of his love for us in a powerful way. We fix our eyes on Jesus. And I don't just mean a quick glance.

I don't mean that we just, all right, I'll glance over there from time to time. No, we fix our eyes. We fix our gaze. We fix our attention. We truly set our gaze on him. And his love for us becomes so apparent and real that it spills over into our testimony to others.

It just becomes who we are. It oozes out of us. It becomes who we are in Christ. One of the best examples that I've read of just kind of this example of keeping your eyes fixed on Jesus and how the love just comes out for us is the story of Dawson Trotman.

Anybody ever heard of Dawson Trotman? Okay, we're going to learn something today. Dawson Trotman, he was the founder of the Navigators. And he lived, before coming to Christ, he lived a pretty rough life.

[26:13] In fact, he rarely ever went to church. He was a bootlegger during Prohibition and was making and selling alcohol all over and always trying to steal things and just really got in a bad way with his life.

But once he began a relationship with Jesus and saw Jesus as his greatest treasure, once he fixed his eyes on Jesus, then everything changed.

His life was committed to telling others about Jesus. He founded the Navigators and part of the heart and soul behind the Navigators was to come alongside new believers and to help them grow in their relationship with the Lord.

It's not just about making converts. The Great Commission doesn't say, go and make converts. It says, go and make disciples. And so he understood the importance of investing in people's lives and helping them grow in this.

And he gave his life to this. And in fact, all the remaining time he had on this earth, up until he was 50 years old, he gave his life to making much of Jesus.

[27 : 21] And in fact, when his life was cut short, it's a tragic story, but a beautiful story at the same time. He was actually speaking at a youth conference.

And in between sessions, he and a young girl who was attending the youth conference got thrown out of a ski boat as they were out on a lake. And from the time it took the ski boat to turn around and come back to get them, Dawson was holding this girl up out of the water so that she could breathe. By the time that the boat got to them, they were just able to grab the girl, and he drowned in the process. And it was a beautiful story because one of the things that Billy Graham said at Dawson's funeral, he says, Dawson died the way he lived, holding others up.

You see, he gave his life to making much of Jesus. The only way that this is possible is by keeping our eyes fixed on him, by focusing on the things of him, by putting on the righteousness, by putting on what God has called us to do.

You see, disciples grow by putting off, but also by putting on the things of God. All of this is possible by keeping our eyes and our gaze fixed on him.

[28 : 35] If we set our gaze on Jesus, then our focus becomes the things that he focuses on. Our gaze becomes what he gazed on. Our love becomes what he loves. You know, sometimes people will say, you know, if you focus so much on these things, if you get so heavenly minded, you'll do no earthly good.

And I guess I get where they're coming from in a sense. If we get so heavenly minded, if we're so focused on the things of God, that we begin to remove ourselves from this world, and we begin to just live like monks where we don't have any interaction with anybody else, and where we're only focused on these things, then yes, I guess that we could remove ourselves from this world enough to not do good.

But I don't think that any of us are in real danger of doing that. I believe that we are to fix our gaze on him. C.S. Lewis said this, he says, This continual looking forward to the eternal world is not a form of escapism or wishful thinking.

But one of the things a Christian is meant to do. It does not mean that we are to leave the present world as it is. If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did the most for the present world were those who thought the most of the next.

The apostles themselves, who set out on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire. The great men who built up the Middle Ages. The English evangelicals who abolished the slave trade.

[30 : 03] All left their mark on earth precisely because their minds were occupied with heaven.

What we clearly see from this passage is that we are to live a life where we are stopping things and we are starting things.

We put to death, that is earthly, and we set our gaze on the things of God. Last week, Ken mentioned on Sunday night in our time, he mentioned the fact that he challenged me in college to memorize Colossians chapter 3.

And at the time, I did. I thought he was going to get me up here and try to say it for everybody on the spot. I'm glad he didn't. But one of the things that he said, he mentioned the fact that this was something that I memorized during college.

But also during that time, I was challenged by a campus minister to come up with a purpose statement for my life. And this is what I came up with, and it still remains a purpose statement for my life today.

And I think you'll see the impact that Colossians 3 had on it. I said this, I said, I want to live a life where I am daily dying to this world and constantly living in light of what Christ has done for me.

[31 : 16] By foremost leading my family closer to God and then discipling friends that God has placed in my life. So others who don't know Christ will see him through me.

Sounds great. But it is a daily struggle to live that out. It's far easier to come up with that than it is to actually live that out.

But what we see is it's worth it. What we see is following God is worth it, and he gives us the tools that we need. Very quickly, just looking at these last two verses, Let the word of Christ dwell in us richly, teaching and admonishing one another in wisdom, singing songs and hymns and spiritual songs.

You see, we see growth take place by spiritual disciplines. We see growth take place like this by focusing on the things of God, and he gives us tools to do this.

From this, we see that we're to be thankful. A lot of times you don't think of thankfulness as a spiritual discipline, but as we grow into the relationship with God, then thankfulness will be a part of that.

[32 : 24] We also see that we're to dwell in the word. We're to live in the word. We're to read it. It's living and active, and it's sharper than any two-edged sword. Reading God's word and dwelling, and it should be a part of our Christian growth.

We see the importance of accountability in this passage, and holding each other accountable, where it says teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom. We see the need that we have for people to love us enough to hold us accountable.

We also see the importance of worship in this, singing songs and hymns and spiritual things. And then also, we clearly see from this passage that growing in our walk with Christ is important, that we are to whatever we do in word or deed, do in the name of the Lord.

And so this is a two-fold process. When I think about this gospel change, the passage that immediately comes to mind is in Ephesians chapter 4, where it talks about our new life in Christ. And in this new life in Christ, Paul tells us, he says, he gives us an example of what this looks like. He says, let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor doing honest work, so that he'll have something to give to those who are in need.

[33 : 37] And so what we see here is that the Christian life, this growth, is a two-fold process where we're stopping things, but we're starting things. He says, let the thief no longer steal.

The thief has a heart of greed where he wants to take and take and take. But he says, you know what? He needs to do honest work so he'll have something to give. And so the change you see taking place is a change of heart, where it's a change of heart of greed to a heart of generosity. And so this is what it means to have this gospel change in our life, to grow in our relationship with the Lord. And so as you think about your own life, I want you to first ask the question, am I a believer?

This passage is clearly for believers. If then you've been raised with Christ, if you are a believer, then seek the things that are above. Maybe your first step in growing your relationship with Christ today is to begin a relationship.

If that's you, then I encourage you to not leave here today without getting that right. However, if you are a believer, then I want to genuinely ask you to ask this question of yourself.

[34 : 47] What in my life needs to die? What sin in my life needs to be actively put to death? Not just ignored. Not just where we put it off and then try to ignore and pretend and hope that it'll go away.

But what sin in my life needs to actively die? Do I need to actively be putting to death? What sin needs to be dealt with in my life?

But also, let's don't stop there. Then ask yourself, what do I need to put on? What do I need to take off? But also, what do I need to put on? Who do I need to love more?

Who do I need to be more patient with? Who do I need to be kind to? Where do I need to show more humility in my life? How can I be more? How can I set my mind on the things that are above? And so I want you to ask those things today as we move into a time of responding. And as always, the front is always open. You're welcome to come here in the front. Maybe that's your way of taking this seriously.

[35 : 47] Saying, you know what? I'm going to actively be putting this sin to death. I'm going to go down and pray and turn this over to God because ultimately, He's the only one that can save. He's the only one that can deal with this.

I can't do this. I need God's help. Front's always open. I'm always available to help. And maybe you just need to respond where you are. But what I want to encourage you today, this morning, is to

respond in a way that is obedient to God's leading.

Father, thank you so very much for your word. Thank you for passages like Colossians 3 that remind us of who you are, that remind us of our relationship with you and our need to grow in that of not only putting things to death, but also putting things on.

And so, Lord, I pray that for each and every one of us today, you would reveal those areas where we need to be putting sin to death, those sin that just seems to linger, that just seems to stay there. Lord, we give these things over to you and trust that you will be the one who can deal with them.

Trust that you will be the one who can ultimately put those things to death.

[36 : 56] And we see the importance of not only putting that to death, but turning our gaze, turning our fix, turning our eyes to you. So, Lord, help us to put off sin and help us to put on love.

We ask all of this in Jesus' name. Amen. I want to invite you to stand. We're going to sing a song of invitation. If the Lord is speaking to you this morning, won't you respond? So we stand together and sing.