

Who Are We: Growing

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

Ephesians 4 verse 11 And He, that is our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Lord Jesus Christ gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers.

To equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ. Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.

To mature manhood. To the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. So that we may no longer be children.

Tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine. By human cunning. By craftiness in deceitful schemes.

[1 : 05] Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head of the body.

And to Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow.

So that it builds itself up in love. May God bless the hearing and the preaching of His Word.

In the modern classic, Father of the Bride, George Banks is played by Steve Martin and is the father.

During the season of engagement, George Banks prepares his daughter's fiancée for the family's anger problem. He says, talking with his fiancée, his daughter Annie is a very passionate person.

[2 : 06] And passionate people tend to overreact at times. Annie comes from a long line of major overreactors.

Me? I can definitely lose it. My mother? A nut. My grandfather? Stories about him are legendary. The good news is, however, that this overreacting tends to get proportionally less by generations. So your kids could be normal. Passionate people tend to overreact. People who love it now, in a movie, these overreactions played by Steve Martin are hilarious.

But in real life, anger is not funny. It splits marriages, churches, and businesses. It takes thriving relationships into a simmering cold war.

And even to bitter resentment. It's a most destructive sin. And yet a sin common to all. One of my favorite writers says, The shoes of anger are like a pair of open-heeled slippers.

[3 : 18] One size fits all. One size fits all. So how do we turn from anger? Seems so natural.

So simple. Our hearts just start brewing up. Our emotions literally rise. We literally get hot. It seems so hard to stop. Is our hope that our anger gets proportionally less generation after generation?

More importantly for us today, how do we turn from any sin? How do we change?

Now some say we can't change. It is what it is. You are what you are. The die is cast. The lot is fixed. Our personality is decided.

The only thing we can do is accept who we are and adapt and adjust who we are to the world around us. That's what so much of our culture is telling us. In fact, we're so convinced we can't change that we're super skeptical of anyone who claims they have changed.

[4 : 24] We don't believe them. We're just waiting on them to fall. We're watching for the true colors to come back out. I mean, after all, can a leopard change his spots?

But even though, fascinatingly, even though we're convinced we can't change, we still try to change. We're restless and discontent. We change jobs, houses, and spouses.

We start over. We make new plans, new resolutions. We begin new diets year after year after year. But do we ever change?

Are all of our attempts to change just rearranging furniture on the Titanic? Is real change even possible? Unlike every other world religion, Christianity hangs on the promise of real, complete, total change.

Like, if your Christianity doesn't involve a real, complete, total, from the bottom-up change, it's not Christianity. It's not what Jesus came to teach.

[5 : 33] As we studied two weeks ago, discipleship begins with the call of the Almighty God. When He calls us, He does not just deliver us from wrath to sin. He delivers us from death to life. I love the way P.T. Forsythe says it.

Our Savior and His salvation does not simply cancel the charge against us in court and bid us walk out of jail. He meets us at the prison door and puts us in a new way of life.

I love that image. That's exactly the way it is. Well, this new way of life begins with new birth, as we talked about two weeks ago. And this new way of life continues bit by bit, degree by degree, as we change and grow to be more like Christ.

So, in a way where we're going, the call of discipleship begins a vigorous pursuit of growth in Christ. The call of discipleship begins a vigorous pursuit of growth in Christ.

We're going to break this out in three points. The first, the goal is growth. The goal for the Christian is growth. The goal of discipleship is growth in Christ.

[6 : 40] After being called by God, born again, every Christian is set on the path of new life. Called to follow Him. This is what theologians call progressive sanctification.

What they mean is that, in one sense, when you become a Christian, you are sanctified. You're set apart. You're bought with a price, 1 Corinthians 6 says. Your body's not your own anymore. Which is an important word for our generation.

But your body's not your own again. You've been set apart for Him. But in another sense, we're increasingly set apart. As our hearts become more and more conformed to the image of Christ.

As we turn more and more from sin and continue on the race of repentance. And so, sanctification is instantaneous, in one sense. And yet, wonderfully progressive.

Growing more like Christ each day after our conversion. The reality is clear in this text. As he's talking to the church after the first three chapters of Ephesians.

[7 : 38] When he's exalting in all that Christ has done. And turning to command them how to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which they've been called. He begins and orients them with this idea of growth in Christ.

Look in verse 15. Rather than speaking the truth in love. We are to grow up in every way. And to Him who is the head of the body. The whole passage is driving home this conviction to pursue change and growth.

Paul uses two metaphors through this passage. He uses the metaphor of building. Look in verse 12. He said he gave the five-fold gift or four-fold.

To equip the saints from ministry for building up the body of Christ. There's kind of two metaphors in that one phrase. The church is a body. Right?

It's like a body like ours. But there's this building metaphor. So the idea is the church is a construction project. The word for building is the same used outside the Old Testament for constructing homes and temples and various buildings.

[8 : 46] The metaphor means we are not finished homes. We're not ready to sell. The electricians are still running wire. The framing crews are still erecting walls.

The sign in the front yard of our life is under construction. We love that. Because we feel it so deeply.

So he has a metaphor of building that emphasizes this growth. This progress of growth and construction. But he also uses this metaphor of childhood. Look in verse 13.

For building up the body of Christ until we all attain the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God. To mature manhood. To a mature status of man. So that we would no longer.

We may no longer be children. Tossed to and fro by the waves. Carried about by every wind of doctrine. And so on. The image is of a young child growing up.

[9 : 47] A child as you know. When they're immature. They're immature when they're born. They're dependent on mom and dad for everything. They need someone to feed them.

Clothe them. Change them. Soothe them. Gradually they begin to grow up. They begin to express their little personality. Begin to talk. Begin to learn how to cook.

Burn a few things in the process. Learn how to cook. Clothe themselves. They get stronger and stronger. And learn how to work. They become more mature. It's a wonderful progress. It just happens in a child's life.

They gradually become more and more mature. But during this time of immaturity going to maturity. They're not only just immature. Their problem is they're unstable. That's the image.

Look down there. They're no longer children tossed to and fro by the waves. He's saying a child is unstable like a boat in the midst of a sea storm. They're unsteady and unbalanced.

[10:51] They are vulnerable. They're being overcome by the moment. Overwhelmed by emotions. Overpowered by peer pressure. One of the great follies of our cultural moment is how we're encouraging and enabling unstable children to make life-altering decisions.

The Bible doesn't view them that way. Children, perhaps especially teenagers, are unstable not just because of what they don't know, but because of what they think they know.

I love Mark Twain once said, When I was a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much he had learned in seven years.

When we become Christians, we're like that. We're children. We're immature and unstable.

We need to grow. Like we're all somewhere on this process of being born again and being conformed to Jesus Christ, to the head of the body.

[12:03] We're not yet mature. If you notice, we need to attain the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God. What he's talking about is there's a gap. When we're kids and you see this with your kids, there's a gap between theoretical knowledge and experiential knowledge.

There's a gap between things they know from a page, a book, a school book or something like that. And there's a gap between real knowledge, experiential knowledge.

There's a gap between knowing truly. There's a difference between knowing God and God is good and sovereign and trusting his sovereign hand in trouble. There's a massive difference between knowing God gives us our daily bread and waiting on him year after year to do so.

And so part of maturity is closing the gap. The point, though, of this text is the goal of every Christian must be to grow. It must be to grow, to change, to be more like Christ.

The sad reality is some Christians never seem to grow. J.C. Ryle said this in his book, Holiness. He said, There are others of the Lord's people who seem to be always advancing.

[13:52] Ever adding grace to grace and faith to faith and strength to strength. Every time you meet them, their heart seems larger. Their spiritual stature taller and stronger.

Every year they appear more. Appear to see more and know more and believe more and feel more in their religion. These are those who make religion lovely and beautiful in the eyes of all.

When you meet them, you could believe that like Moses, they had just come out from the presence of the Lord. When you part with them, you feel warmed by their company as if your soul had been near a fire.

I'm sure we've all met people like that. Just always progressing. Always growing. Find our souls warm by them. Their heart always larger. Faith always stronger.

Are you like that? It's not as though some people are able to grow and others are not.

[14:54] That's not the reality. I remember years ago, my wife and I went and visited a museum. And we made it to the top exhibit. And the exhibit was all about professionally designed and hip chairs.

Chairs. Yes. It was an architectural exhibit. And we're walking around that museum. And, you know, you get tired when you're walking around museums. And you're just walking around all these chairs. And they had the nice little red markers that kept you away from the chairs. So you're just walking around all these chairs. And the only thing you want to do is the only thing you can't do, which is sit down.

I just found myself dying to try out. I mean, how can you really judge a chair if you don't sit down in it? I found myself dying to do the chair. Well, the promise to grow is not like that.

The promise of growth is not like that. So it's not as if some people are able to grow and some are not. That's not the way the scripture says it. Look in verse 15. He says, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head.

[15:55] Look in verse 16. From whom the whole body joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped. When each part is working properly, makes the body grow. So the idea is

we're to grow up into him who gives all the power to grow and to be more like Christ.

And so I want to urge you. Are you growing? Do you want to grow? If you had the convictions in your life lined up, is growing in Christ in there?

Jonathan Edwards, when he was 19, wrote 70 resolutions for his life. And one of them blew me away this week. He says, resolved to strive to my utmost every week to be brought higher in religion.

Now, he's not using religion in a bad way like we might, you know. He's talking about a sincere faith to be brought higher in religion into a higher exercise of grace than I was the week before.

Is that us? Are we more patient in provocation? More humble in conflict? More bold in evangelism? More compassionate towards those suffering?

[17:06] Are we more restful? More joyful? More disciplined? More balanced? More consistent? More holy? Are the difficulties we're griping about the same difficulties from last year?

Still complaining about too much going on or too little time? Is it time to do something about it? This verse is a wonderful call to throw oneself on God's promise to grow.

So the goal is growth in Christ. Two, the means is hearing and obeying the word. The means by which we grow is hearing and obeying the word.

Look at how it's stated here in verse 15. So in the context, and I'll break out more of the context, but rather he says, speaking the truth in love we are to grow. There is a way we're to grow.

John 17, 17, sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth. And so we are sanctified by speaking the word in truth. The context here is corporate.

[18:16] We're speaking the word to one another in the body. But it reminds us that we grow by hearing and obeying the word of truth. You know, in Jesus' most famous parable, I say it's most famous because it's in all four gospels.

Jesus tells the story of a farmer who goes out to sow. Like a good farmer, he's slinging seed wherever he goes. Slings out the seed.

Some seed falls along the path and the birds come and devour it. It's too shallow. Some seed falls among the rocks surrounding the fields and it grows up quickly, but quickly withers away because there's no good soil there.

Some seed falls among the thorns and the thorns come up and choke out the fruit of the seed. But other seed falls on good soil and it produces much grain.

Now, as in most of the parables, disciples don't get it at first. They're scratching their head. What are you talking about, Lord? He says that the seed is the word and the soil of the hearts of those who hear.

[19:29] What he's saying is that the difference maker between who grows a disciple and who does not or who never becomes a disciple is not their background, not their religious credentials, not their Sunday attendance or any of these things.

What the difference makers, how open their heart is to the word of God, how open it is to hearing. What makes all the difference is whether they hear and obey the word.

Hearing happens as we wake up to the word of truth. The immaturity and instability of childhood is made more difficult because we live in a world of untruth. Untruth.

Look at the way Paul talks about it here. Do you see what threatens us, what tosses us everywhere on the water? Look in verse 14. He says we're tossed to and fro by the ways carried about by every wind of doctrine.

Now, doctrine is a really good thing, but this idea of every wind is this idea that we're just vulnerable to every moving, every faddish doctrine that comes into the perspective.

[20:39] So it's a not good thing. False teachers are coming and leading us astray. Human, so we're vulnerable to every wind of doctrine and human cunning.

So the false teaching is coming from false teachers who are after gain. Now, if you read through the New Testament, the number one concern for the church is not the corrosion of the world.

The number one concern of the church is corrosion from within, from false teaching. That's what we see all throughout the New Testament, especially Revelation. And so it's false teachers who are cunning and chasing power and prominence.

How many false teachers have come and robbed towns? Left churches split wide open. Revealed their true intent.

Watch out. That's what he's saying. Every wind of doctrine by human cunning. He continues craftiness and deceitful schemes. I think that's a reference to the evil one.

[21 : 41] So it's not merely the craftiness and deceitfulness of false teaching and false teachers, but the false one himself, the deceiver. All of it alerts us to the ever-present danger of being lured away from the truth.

Our kids and our family loves the Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe series we just cannot get over. C.S. Lewis, he wrote it years ago. His book, *The Silver Chair*, has this vivid scene in which the queen of the underland is holding Jill, Eustace, and Puddleglum captive in her underground cave. She tries to convince him that there's no world but her world. So here she is in this little lyre. As a liar, I guess, you know, trying to convince him that there's no other world but this world.

She creates a perfect place for them to fall asleep. Soft music, dim lights. I mean, all we had to do was dim the lights, half of us would be down.

You know, it would be nap time and fourth grade again. Soft music, dim lights, warm fire, pleasant smells. Suddenly she begins to lie.

[22 : 56] There's no land called Narnia. There's no land called Narnia. There never was any world but mine. No land called Narnia.

Never was any world but mine. Suddenly Puddleglum jumps up, stomps out the fire, and clears his head and wakes up. We live in a world that's luring us to sleep.

It is. We live in a God-ignoring world. A God-denying world. We live in an evangelical culture that's slipping in very concerning ways, luring us to sleep with unbiblical teaching and unbiblical lies.

The first thing that happens when we hear the word of truth is we wake up. Like Puddleglum, we stamp out the fire and say, that's not true. I love it.

Obedying happens as we walk out the word of truth. So hearing happens as we hear the word of truth. And hearing happens as we wake up to the word of truth. And obeying happens as we walk out the word of truth.

[24 : 09] As walking follows waking, so obeying follows hearing. The idea is that hearing and obeying are meant to always be true. The ones who hear the most, the church of Jesus Christ, the ones who hear the most are the ones that are supposed to obey the most.

Sadly, it's often not true. As George Bernard Shaw once said, Christianity would be a great thing if anyone tried it. But it's not meant to be that way.

Hearing and obeying are meant to be coupled together. Christianity is not a set of beliefs. It's not a set of things that you must think. It includes things that you must think. But it is a way of life. Six times in the book of Acts, it describes Christianity as the way.

The way. It's not about sitting somewhere and knowing somewhere. It's taking you somewhere. Towards something. Following someone.

That's why it says, walk in a man. Look at verse 1. I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called. Now walking is the most normal.

[25 : 13] Most basic human movement. It came to refer to one's way of life. One's walk. So he's saying, walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called. Let your whole way of life be Christ-like.

Walk like Christ. Doesn't mean that you wear a bracelet and you say WWJD every time you have a question. That's not what is going on there. It's about your lifestyle being conformed to him because that's what walking refers to.

That's why in the Old Testament, do not walk in the way of the wicked. I'm not talking about a literal path. I'm talking about a way of life. Walk before me and be blameless.

Walk in the ways of your father. Shame on you. You did not walk in the ways of your father, Dave. All this makes clear obeying God means movement. It's wonderfully, it's not okay to not be okay in the church, but wonderfully also true, it's not okay to stay there.

Obedying God means movement. It demands action. Faith without works is dead. Let us not love in word and speech, but in action and truth.

[26 : 26] Be doers of the word. Not hearers only. Deceiving yourself. Doers. Now, doers of the word.

That's an odd phrase, isn't it? What does that mean? You know, I'm a doer. I don't like to sit still. I like to get things done. Is that what it's talking about? That's not what it's talking about, actually.

But literally, the word means be a maker, builder, producer, practicer of the word. The idea is our hearing is meant to produce something visible. The seed of the word goes into our hearts, but the fruit comes out in our lives.

Our hearing is meant to produce. What good is a maker who doesn't make? What good is a builder who doesn't build? What good is an artist who doesn't create? What good is a hearer who doesn't respond?

The seed of the word bears visible fruit. So if there is no fruit, there's no root. So in some ways, today could be a reckoning.

[27 : 35] You know, as I've gone across our county and met lots of people, my concern is not their story. My concern is their life. They got a great story. I was baptized this age. I did all these things.

But they don't have a great life. Their life's not in conformity to Jesus Christ, nor is mine. By God, I'm chasing it with all I got. I call on you, urge on you.

You know, if your life is not in conformity, I want to offer you the gospel of Jesus Christ, which does not just cancel your record of sin. It demands that you must be born again. Our Christianity hangs not just on a cross, but on an empty tomb.

Because he raises a people to follow him and to walk in the fullness of the spirit. And I say, if you believe in Jesus Christ, God will send power from on high to cause you to be born again.

He'll spend times of refreshing on you to cause you to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel. To make your Christianity sincere.

[28 : 36] Not perfect, but sincere. Wonderfully, though, all you have to do is walk. Walking is the most basic human movement.

But it's also the most pathetic one. If you're an exerciser type of person, who wants to walk? So slow, so gradual, so incremental.

But that's all God asks of you. Obeying God happens one step at a time. One step. We live in a fast-paced, immediate results culture, but the Christian life is a long obedience.

It's one step at a time, one day at a time. It's a path that depends on daily bread and daily mercies. It's a path in which we must not let the sun go down on our anger, but we must not try to keep the sun up with our worry.

Because sufficient for the day are its own troubles. Several years ago, author and pastor Tim Challies, his 18-year-old son suddenly died on his college campus during a game of Frisbee.

[29 : 50] Wrote a book called Seasons of Sadness, I believe. He begins a chapter in his book saying, I miss my son today. That goes without saying, I suppose, since I miss him every day.

But on this day, the pain is particularly sharp, the ache especially deep. He goes on to talk about the weight of grief that rests upon him every day, the great weight of grief God has called him to carry.

He says, I just don't know how I will bear up under this sorrow if I have to carry it all the way to the end. He goes on to tell a story of working with his dad one day.

His dad was a landscaper, and he was like 12 years old. He goes to work with his dad one day. And as they're working together, his dad asked him to carry a whole pallet of bricks from the driveway all the way up to the front yard of the house, to the entrance of the house, where they're going to make a path.

He was only 12 or 13. He says, how can I move that whole pile of bricks? His dad said, one by one, brick by brick, step by step.

[31 : 17] Tim Challice said, as he applied this to his own life, he said, while God has called me to bear my grief for a moment and to do so faithfully, he's not called me to bear the entire weight of it all at once.

As that pile was made up of many bricks, a lifetime is made up of many days. The burden of a whole lifetime's grief would be far too heavy to bear, and the challenge of a whole lifetime's faithfulness far too daunting to consider.

But the God who knows my frailty has broken that assignment into little parts. Now that'll work. If you put this to practice in your life, this will work.

He's broken that assignment into little parts, little days, and has promised grace sufficient for each one of them. My challenge for today is not to bear the grief of a lifetime or to be faithful to the end, but only to carry today's grief and only to be faithful on this one little day that he has spread out before me.

What is that? That's obeying God by walking. Little parts, little days.

[32 : 42] Point three, the context, the local church. The context is the local church.

The context in which we grow in this passage and much of the New Testament is the local church.

The passage begins by discussing the spiritual gifts of each member of the church.

Then it discusses gifted men who are given to the church, but threading through this passage is this emphasis on growing with the church. On the one hand, we grow alongside one another.

Look in verse 13. So that until we all, so this is something we're in together, we're all in the race car. On this one, we all attain to the unity of faith.

Look in verse 14. So that we may no longer, so we, again, may no longer be children. In verse 15, speaking the truth and love, we are to grow up in every way.

[33 : 40] So we're alongside one another on this path, this race called the Christian life. Charles Spurgeon says, some Christians try to go to heaven alone in solitude, but believers are not compared to bears or lions or other animals that wander alone.

Those who belong to Christ are sheep in this respect, that they love to get together. Sheep go in flocks and so do God's people. And that's what we see. They grow alongside one another.

But the point of the passage also says they grow with the help of one another. Look in verse 16.

From whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Every local church is a whole church in that respect. Not talking about the whole body of Christ. Not as if we have a limb over there in Africa or something like that. The reference is to a whole body.

All the parts that are needed is right there in it. Every joint and each part are vital to grow. In the same way that a body begins to dysfunction without a heart or a thumb or whatever, so the church begins to dysfunction when each part is not bearing the load.

[35 : 05] Our new mission statement that we wrote out a couple weeks ago is, Trinity Grace exists to make disciples of Jesus Christ, who make disciples in Athens and beyond for the glory of God.

One of the things we're trying to say with that statement of saying, Trinity Grace exists to make disciples of Jesus Christ, who make disciples is that the church is a disciple-making factory in which every person is engaged.

You can't clock out on this one. The church demands everyone, needs everyone. Disciples are those who keep making disciples. All of them in different ways with different giftings, but committed to it.

And one of the most important ways we grow with the help of one another is through imitation.

When I was growing up, there was nothing worse than being called a poser.

Somebody who wore vans but couldn't do a kickflip. You know, you were the epitome of trash or something. I don't know. Modern words.

But, and so, your culture is not much different. You know, we strike out. We want to be original. We want to blaze our own path. Try to dress in our own way.

[36 : 19] Try to do our own thing. We never want to get caught doing what other people do. Ugh. Never. We would never want to imitate another person.

But the fact is, the most important thing you've learned, important things you've learned in your life, in your entire life, is through imitation. I mean, how did you learn to pray?

How did you learn to find meaning in the text of scripture? How did you learn to shoot a jump shot?

Let's check out a book on jump shots, you know. No. How did you learn to tie your shoes?

My kids were making fun of me the other day because I still do the bunny ears, you know. I'm like, 43, still doing bunny ears. I'm like, hey, this is the way I like doing it. Back away from you. It's the way I learned.

Like at three. And I can't do the wraparound thing, you know. I was not taught. How did you learn to write your name? How did you learn to dot an I?

[37 : 20] How did you learn to braid your hair, cut grass, or sight your rifle? You learned by watching. You learned by imitation. Listen, we will not accomplish our mission if we all don't buy in on this.

If our church is a bunch of individuals who gather on Sundays for an hour and then split and go our different ways, we're not going to accomplish. We're going to be immature.

Growth and change is a community project. It cannot be done alone. We need you to say to someone, come. I'll read the Bible with you. I'll show you how to do a Bible study.

I remember when I became a Christian in 2001, fell into a local church. I didn't know how to pray. I said, hey, can I come over to you? I had like five minutes in church. I said, can I come over to your house at 5 a.m., 6 a.m., whatever time you're doing your Bible, can I just pray with you? Just walk in with my cup of coffee, sit down and just pray for 20 minutes, 15 minutes, whatever, and leave. It was amazing. I'd go out and pray and fall asleep. I didn't know how to pray.

[38 : 33] But they were helping. So we need people to say, come, I'll show you the fundamentals of the faith. Come, I'll teach you how to pray. Come, I'll seek to show you how to do good to your husband every day of your life.

Come, I'll show you how to be a godly husband or father. I'll show you what it means to be a godly woman or a godly man. Is there anyone in your life you're talking to like that?

I mean, if we're getting older in the Lord and we have no one learning from us, we either don't have anything to teach or we've organized our life around ourself. The Bible presents so much of the Christian life in the local church as disciples just discipling one another all over the place.

In many ways, we could say we need to pursue a Timothy. If you're young in the Lord, pursue a Timothy. Or pursue a Paul, rather. You know, if you're young in the Lord, pursue a Paul.

That's what we see with Paul. He mentored Timothy at the end of his life. Told him everything he needed to know. You know, pursue someone older in the Lord. If you're a Paul, if you've been a Christian for a length of time, look for a Timothy.

[39 : 50] That's what scripture says. Look for a Timothy. Look for a Barnabas. Look for someone to run with. Barnabas was a man of encouragement. We need those men. And be that type of man for someone.

That's what it's like. Pursue a Paul. Pursue a Barnabas. Pursue a Timothy. Most of all, pursue Christ. That's what's going on. This disciple-making factory.

You know, as our church gets older, Lord willing, we're planning to start more ministries. But the ministries of this church will be trying to position us to do this. Like to do this one-anothering ministry.

I mean, that's what small groups are meant to be. But hopefully we'll do mentoring in the days to come where you can come alongside someone and look. But in and through all that we're doing as a church, I want to implore you to be looking like this.

To look over the fence of your yard and saying, hey, can I hang out with you? Can we read this book together? Can we walk?

[40 : 51] It doesn't have to be complex. Can we grab burrito, whatever it is? Can we figure this out together? That's the way change happens.

So can anyone really change? Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Is real, total, complete change even possible? After all, we're corrupt to the core, aren't we? Jeremiah 13, 23 says, can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots?

Kind of saying, can anybody change? Ethiopian can't shed his skin. Leopard can't change his spots. But Christianity says, yes. The sinner can be changed.

The stone heart can become flesh. The leopard can change his spots. Again and again, the truth of Christianity is not a code of ethics or a life map or fire insurance.

[42 : 04] It's a new heart. And the call of discipleship is to pursue it with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. In a moment, we're going to conclude by singing Jesus Paid It All, the old hymn, and celebrating the baptism of three of our new members.

That's what baptism points to. It's a visible sign of an inner, interior, invisible reality, new birth. Somewhere along the way, the third verse was changed.

Do we have that third verse you can project there? Or maybe second verse, I don't know. The one that starts, Lord, now indeed I find thy power and thine alone.

Well, maybe second verse. Well, it says, Lord, now indeed I find thy power and thine alone can change.

The way we've always sung it is the leper's spots and melt the heart of stone. Now, leper's spots are nowhere used in that way in the Bible.

[43 : 11] The leper's condition is serious but never called spots in Scripture. Actually, based on Jeremiah 13, 23, the original verse was, Lord, now indeed I find thy power and thine alone can change the leopard's spots.

It can change us from the core and melt the heart of stone, like Ezekiel 36 says. So that's what we're going to sing. So much more sense that it makes, so much more powerful as we look to celebrate the new birth and these baptisms.

Let us pray. Father in heaven, we thank you and we hide in you. We thank you for drawing us into the manifold wisdom of God.

Thank you that we are no longer strangers and aliens but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God built on Jesus Christ. Lord, we pray that you, I pray that you would continue to build this church.

There's wonderful things that you've done, God, but we pray for more unity, more maturity, more gratefulness, more joy, more awe, more spiritual gifts deployed, more maturity in each of our ministries, we pray for your glory.

[44 : 41] Lord, we want to be a people that make disciples and keep making disciples for the glory of God. So help us, we pray. In Jesus' name, amen.

You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com.

Amen.