

The Foundation of Growth In Christ: Living a Dedicated Christian Life

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- [0 : 00] Okay, let's bow our heads and ask God's blessing on us tonight as we worship.! Father, thank You for this blessed time and for Your blessed gospel.
- ! You are the great, great God of the universe and the salvation of men. And we thank You, God, that people everywhere, believing and unbelieving, are saved by Your grace in one sense or another.
- They're saved in the sense that they're given life and they are allowed to enjoy Your world, even in their unbelief. And then some are saved thoroughly by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as You give them the gift of faith, lead them to repentance, and then teach them to walk with You.
- And so, God, that's who we are tonight. We want to learn to walk with Jesus and bring much glory to Your name, especially, Lord, as we face our own weaknesses, temptations, and especially as we face the trials of life.
- God, we need Your grace and mercy. And we need to understand better what it means to have a heart wholly and completely devoted to You. God, how do we protect that heart?
- [1 : 14] Father, how do we look to You to safeguard us in being devoted to You and keeping our worship pure when there are so many things that seem to distract and discourage us, draw us away from who You are?
- Well, we pray that You'll help us tonight as You minister Your wisdom from Your Word to our hearts. Thank You for these dear brothers and sisters, God. And in many ways, they are the loves of my life as You have given me and Greg the privilege to shepherd them and serve them.
- And so now, as we seek to feed them, may You be pleased and honored with how we handle Your Word and the way that we do this. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.
- Okay, beloved, let's start by jumping into the topic with some questions and a little bit of interaction since this is our first night.
- Some of you probably aren't used to the format here. This is a teaching time, and yet Greg and I want it to be interactive. We'll just have to let you know on the front end that we might have to limit some of that interaction just a bit to make sure that we're able to move to the conclusions we want to make with the teaching and not leave it open-ended so much.
- [2 : 34] Okay, so here's what we're dealing with. The foundation of growth in Christ. And the foundation that I'll be speaking about will be two or three of these teaching lessons.
- The foundation. Then we'll move to a different aspect of growth in Christ. But right now, we're talking about foundational elements, basic elements that we all need to understand and apply in our lives.
- So this is session one, or lesson one, living a dedicated Christian life. That's where we're going to start. Now, I'm not going to assume that even as a Christian, you understand what I mean by this or what the Bible means by this, more importantly.

And so we need to begin by talking about some aspects of what dedication is. What dedication is. This is going to be Romans 12, 1 and 2.

That's where we'll be. I'm not going to read it right this moment. You can turn to it if you'd like and be ready. We'll read it in just a few moments. But let me throw this question up there for you to begin thinking about with me.

[3 : 52] What does it mean for you? Now look, not your spouse, not your pastor, not people in your life. What does it mean for you to be dedicated to Jesus?

In other words, what does it look like for you to live a dedicated Christian life? What does that look like in your life? And if you were to give me answers to that, I hope that what we would find is that there would be similarities to what that looks like in other Christians' lives.

People in this room. There may be some nuances, a little bit of difference. For example, the way you live a dedicated Christian life as a woman might look a little bit different from how a man in this room lives his dedicated Christian life.

But there would be some overlap too, wouldn't there? Wouldn't you expect that? Sure. And so we want to think about that. What does it look like for you to live a dedicated Christian life?

Think of it this way too, friends. When someone recognizes dedication or we can use another word, devotion, devotion in you, they are saying that you are specially and uniquely set apart to a certain pursuit or maybe a certain relationship or even an idea, a way of thinking.

[5 : 26] You're devoted to that idea. You're devoted to that relationship or that person. You're devoted to that particular hobby or pursuit. But they can see that devotion in your life if it's devotion, right?

The point I'm making here is simply this. If we're going to talk about dedication and devotion, we need to understand that should show up in our life. So we can't say I'm dedicated to this or I'm devoted to this and people look at you and go, what?

You are? You with me? Okay. This is what I'm getting at. People can hear your dedication in the way that you talk about what's important to you, can't they?

People can see your dedication and how you prioritize your time, what you do with your money and other resources and other resources towards what you are most devoted to.

People will look at your life and the different aspects of your life, categories of your life, relationships of your life, and people will make determinations about what's important to you.

[6 : 40] What's most important to you is what you're devoted to, what you're dedicated to. I could have used the word devotion as well because I'll use those interchangeably.

When people look at the way you live, here's the question, when people look at the way you live, what do they see? Will you think about that with me for a moment?

Sometimes it's hard for us to step back and be objective about what other people are seeing in our life because we're convinced of this is what's important to me, this is what people recognize about me.

But I wonder, when people look at your life, what do they see? How does your lifestyle demonstrate your personal devotion to Jesus Christ?

How does the daily life that you live repeatedly emphasize and make clear your devotion to Jesus so that people are left in no doubt about the dedication and devotion of your heart?

[7 : 54] Or do people see competitors to that devotion? Alright? Let's let the tension in the room build just a little bit more and then I'll let it out.

We're all in that boat. Are we not? All of us are feeling that tension right now because none of us in this room 24-7 make a clear demonstration of devotion to Jesus.

Because we're not in heaven yet. But that can't be an excuse for a lack of devotion, can it? No. And this is why it's necessary for us to talk about these things and this is why Greg and I have prayed and prayed that more and more of our people would dedicate themselves and commit themselves to being here on a Wednesday night to learn about these things and to hear each other discuss them together so that we can be encouraged to live for the Lord.

Alright? Let me put this up here just to continue to whet your appetite for it. The most revealing aspect of your godly devotion is your own personal holiness.

It's your commitment to personal purity. To pursuing Christ-likeness. Please note that word, pursuing. Am I like Jesus when no one is looking?

[9 : 22] Is becoming more like Jesus in all that I think, say, and do a growing commitment that defines my life and character?

I'm going to pause there for a moment and say it this way. Am I like Jesus when no one is looking and is becoming, becoming more like Jesus in all that I think, say, and do a growing commitment that shapes, shapes my life and character?

That's what I mean by defines. Much of what I think, say, and do, if not most of what I think, say, and do, I think, say, and do because of being conformed to Jesus.

Because of the devotion of my heart to Christ. I think out of that devotion, I speak out of that devotion, and I live out of that devotion. Now, I'll pause and say this.

Some of us might be thinking, this is impossible. This is a pie-in-the-sky teaching that no Christian can live up to. Well, the Lord would never have given us commands to do this if it weren't for us being able to do it in the power of the Spirit, and that's the key.

[10 : 48] We're going to talk about those keys to being able to live this kind of life. You can live like this. You can live consumed with Jesus in a good way.

You can live where your thoughts and your actions and your motives and your goals and the desires of your life are all shaped by a superior devotion to Jesus so that you love Him even more than you love yourself.

You want to bring glory to Him more than you want to bring glory to you. This is why I say it's the most revealing aspect of your godly devotion when I talk about personal holiness.

Alright, another one here. Becoming more like Jesus changes your view of your own sin. These are important aspects that I'm fleshing out at the beginning about why we're going to do this together.

Becoming more like Jesus changes your view of your own sin. Does my sin break my heart because I know it breaks God's heart?

[12 : 04] Does my sin break my heart because I know it breaks God's heart? God's heart is going to do it. You want to come to the place in your life where when you recognize you have sinned, when your conscience bears witness against you in some aspect of you sinning, sinning, the first thing is the grief over the fact that it grieves God.

Whether anybody else was looking or anybody else was involved is not the issue. so the damage you do to other people isn't the issue.

The damage you do to yourself isn't the issue in that moment. It's the grief that you cause your Lord and Savior who gave himself to purchase you away from the power and penalty of the sin you just committed.

When you wear the burden of the grief of God's heart for your sin, it changes you and it changes the way you view your sin. Now you're dealing with your sin out of devotion to God and not out of a desire not to get caught or not to get punished or whatever.

Do you see how that emphasizes and communicates maturity to you? Do you understand how now we're talking about a growing in Christ likeness?

[13 : 38] We tend to think about that level as being something up here for super saints and pastors. But it's not. I used to think that.

I used to be one of those people. I had such a high view of the pulpit and the men in it when I first got saved. I never ever could see myself being the kind of Christian those men were.

And we had women in the church that I had that high regard for who just glowed a wonderful beauty of the Lord Jesus. And it made them beautiful.

It really did. And I thought, wow, will I ever even closely resemble that? You know, or kind of, I didn't know, I didn't understand.

Becoming more like Jesus changes your heart. It changes the way you think about sin. that brings us to the issue of your heart. I'll put this up there.

[14 : 39] Because your heart's desires determine your actions. The motives and desires of your heart determine how you live. So, what are your reasons for being committed and devoted to certain things in your life?

Think about that with me. What are your reasons for being committed and devoted to certain things in your life?

Alright, here's a little interaction. Do you guys think that there's anything wrong with having commitment, dedication, and devotion to other things in your life beyond Jesus Himself?

Is there anything wrong with that in principle? Mark? Okay, Mark's summation here, his concise answer is it depends on where those desires and motivations come in.

Is Jesus over those and becoming hurt? Or? Okay, so where do those motives and desires fit in terms of my devotion and relationship to the Lord?

[16 : 06] Mark says they should be under the Lord Jesus Christ. Alright, let me swing back around over this side and ask again. So in principle, Mark's given us an important caveat.

God, in principle form, is there anything wrong with being devoted and being dedicated to things or whatever other than the Lord Jesus Christ in the way that we live?

I'm looking at marriages right now and I'm hoping I'm going to get a good answer to this question. Help me, Alonza, I'm suffering up here.

Okay. But you weren't, you weren't devoted to Bob. Oh, Alonza.

Oh, yes, I am. Bless you. Amen. Mona, you weren't, you weren't devoted to Pedro. Oh, yes, you were. No, there it is.

[17 : 20] And that's what y'all are saying. Right? So there are other, there are other things in our life we're devoted to and dedicated to. Here's what I'm trying to say to you.

It doesn't have to be an either or. It can be a both and. But now we have to go back around here to this very important caveat that he led off with. It's where does that love and devotion and dedication fall in terms of my relationship to Christ?

How, if, any ways, am I allowing the Lord to help me shape and define my dedication to that person, to those things?

Where is the Lord Jesus in that? How is my devotion to him factoring in to any other devotion that I might have in this life toward anything or anyone?

He has to be reflected. All right, Carolyn said that it's an umbrella and there's an extension of who he is involved in how we are devoted or dedicated to others.

[18 : 33] What about dedication to a hobby? Is that wrong? Is it possible for us to get things in our dedication to our spouse at a level where our dedication to our spouse is actually diluting or even distracting us from a fuller dedication to Jesus?

That happens. Okay, so now we're beginning to see some of the ways that our great enemy, and even the deceitfulness of our own heart can begin to chip away and draw away from what we're talking about in the way of devotion to Jesus.

It can happen just like that. You remember me telling you several times over the last few months, Satan wants you to worship.

He wants you to come to church. He wants you to read your Bible. Isn't that shocking? He wants you to serve in the church. He wants you to be religious.

He wants you to be devoted. He just doesn't want you to make any of that about Jesus Christ. He wants Jesus plus. He wants it to be with Jesus but then some other stuff added to it and you just kind of put Jesus in there.

[20 : 00] it's kind of like sermons you might have heard where they get a concept and they're wanting to say the things they want to say and they throw a Bible verse in maybe here or there to kind of prove their case and then they move on.

And people do Jesus like that. I'm basically going to live the way I want to live and I'll squeeze Jesus in when it's convenient or helpful. Satan wants you to worship and Satan wants you in every way to come to church and do all these religious things.

He just doesn't want all of that to be about being devoted to Jesus Christ. He wants you to be a hypocrite. He wants you to be shallow.

And he'll keep you there if he can. Folks, he does this in pastors' lives. Greg and I are in great danger of making what we do academic or making what we do anything but.

Can you believe that we could spend the hours we spend preparing messages, ministering to God's people, shepherding the word of God and prayer and it not be about Jesus?

[21 : 09] It can happen. It does happen. And it's something that we have to safeguard ourselves from. Alright, so we're thinking about this. Now, are you willing to allow the Lord to show you if the dedication of your heart is misplaced or misapplied in areas of your life?

I hope that's a yes because you're going to find out that there is some of that in your life. You can't allow the scrutiny of the Holy Spirit using His word to search your heart and not expect the Spirit of God to show you the truth of that question in your life.

Of course there are ways that your devotion to Jesus is misplaced or misapplied in your life because we're not in heaven yet. So we want God's word to search those things out so that we can repent and grow in conformity to the image of His Son.

Alright, question or comment about any of that introductory material before we read the passage? We tracking? Everybody's tracking.

You're just ready to get into the word, aren't you? Okay. Well, let's read Romans 12, 1 and 2. I'm going to ask my brother, Greg, if he would read those two verses for us.

[22 : 36] Romans 12, verses 1 and 2. I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Alright, now let me ask you, in these two verses we have a central appeal that Paul is making. What would you say would be the central appeal that Paul is making in verse 1?

Is it clear to you? It's a little bit worded a little bit different. That's why I asked Greg to read out of the LSB, right? Or ESB.

Central appeal. What do you think? Okay, so is that what he's appealing to?

[23 : 44] He's making an appeal for what? Okay, thank you, Alonza. So look up here, Romans 12, 1 and 2. Paul's central appeal, make dedicating ourselves to God our most faithful pursuit in life.

Thank you, Alonza. make this pursuit central. So dedicating could also be again that word devotion.

Make being devoting or devoting yourself to God your most faithful pursuit in life. Now, how do we pursue a life of focused and faithful dedication to Jesus like this?

Like we've been reading and describing. And there are two parts to that answer. So here's the question again. How do we pursue, since that's what I'm talking about, pursuing, how do we pursue a life of focused and faithful dedication to Jesus like this in these two verses?

Two parts to that answer. The first part here with the second. We can do this by God's grace as we prevent our hearts from being conformed to the world and instead pursue Jesus through spiritually transformed hearts.

[25 : 07] Do you see that? I hope you see that in the verses. So we've got prevent and we've got pursue. We've got something that you want to avoid and something that you want to adopt.

Now how does Paul tell us to avoid foolish worship? Because that's at the heart of this.

How do you and I daily surrender the worship of our hearts to God, the devotion of our hearts to God, so that we present ourselves to Him in terms of this passage as living holy sacrifices acceptable to the Lord and offered up to God as our spiritual service of worship to Him?

The way the NAS reads. How do we do that? What does that look like? This is the question among others that are very similar that we're going to be answering for the remainder of our lessons together through the weeks, the coming weeks, God willing.

Now Paul tells us the way that we do this. He tells us, because he's just spent eleven chapters laying out the doctrinal foundation for our relationship with God in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[26 : 28] Eleven chapters of the most important theological treatise ever written spelling out the doctrinal foundation, the teaching, instructing foundation for what it means for us to have a relationship with God through his son Jesus Christ.

And now he begins to spell out what a living, breathing, walking around sacrifice looks like.

Mark, that reminds me, because of what I just said. When I was doing this in Poland and I got to here, there was great consternation about how to translate what I just said.

And now, Paul begins to spell out what a living, breathing, walking around sacrifice to God looks like. I got a four page treatise back from Poland on the terminology and I forgot to print it out for you.

So, remind me, it is really something. Wait till you see the scholarly, this is from one elder and his brilliant daughter, Anya, who is a linguist.

[27 : 42] they came together and answered the questions you and I ask about that. So, we asked them to help us understand how the Polish Bible handles three different passages where it emphasizes walking with Jesus and why it's so difficult in the Polish language to translate that in the sense that the Bible communicates it.

And so, he sent that back to me. Yeah, it is awesome. It's really something. Yeah, anyway, so as I look at this, I'm thankful to God that we are not struggling with that particular aspect of it.

We're struggling more with, no, we're getting what it means. The hard part is getting it into our lives in terms of what it means. Alright, so he's spelling this out for us in what he's already covered.

I want to show you how he now summarizes what he's been saying for 11 chapters by what he says to us in Romans 12, 9-21.

So, listen to this. Let love be without hypocrisy. Now, do you see? He goes right to what I said earlier.

[29 : 02] We do not want to live as hypocrites. That's what Satan wants. Just don't make it about Jesus and you live like a hypocrite. Let love be without hypocrisy.

Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.

Give preference to one another in honor. Not lagging behind in diligence. Fervent in your spirit. Serving the Lord.

Rejoicing in hope. Persevering in tribulation. Devoted to prayer. Contributing to the needs of the saints. Practicing hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice. And weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another.

[30 : 02] And do not be haughty in might. But associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. Never pay back evil for evil to anyone.

Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, vengeance but if your enemy is hungry, feed him.

If he's thirsty, give him a drink. For in so doing, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Folks, that is a summation of 11 chapters of doctrine being lived out. Chapter 12 is a turning place in Paul's letter where he now moves from more formal!

instruction that lays the foundation for what we're to understand in the way of sound doctrine and now moves it into now here's how you apply that doctrine in your life.

[31 : 10] Here are some instructions that help you know what it looks like for you to start living out this devotion. And I want you to notice the beginning of chapter 12 everything he just said and everything that came before it for 11 chapters is all based on the mercies of God.

That's the foundation. The foundation for our devotion to God and the foundation for our duty to God are both the mercies of the Lord toward us in Jesus Christ.

There's no greater motive. There's no greater foundation than knowing the love of God for us and His Son on the cross. And that's why we're told to constantly rehearse the gospel to ourselves because this is how it will affect us.

Well, that's it, friends. And that's what I told the Polish people when I got to this point. I looked up at them and I said, there you go, friends, the normal Christian life. The normal Christian life.

Because Jesus Christ is living in you. Paul would never give this instruction to us if we didn't have the Lord Jesus living in us to empower devotion to Jesus, we're denying who we are.

[32 : 33] We're betraying what Jesus has made us to be. That's not a small thing in the eyes of the Lord. It's a hard and tragic thing.

So, a living, walking sacrifice looks like a person who is becoming more like Jesus.

You look like a person entirely devoted to worshiping God in every detail of life. A heart devoted to God strives to live in worship to God in all things and in all ways.

Again, as I say these things like in all things and in all ways, I'm simply trying to be comprehensive while at the same time as a sinner and a human being myself, understanding that we all fall short of all.

We all fall short of all, all the time, in all ways. Nevertheless, this is what we're called to be and do. So, are you striving to be more like Jesus because you are making your life about Jesus?

[33 : 56] There's a big difference between adding Jesus to your agenda and Jesus being the agenda. A life truly devoted to God doesn't just happen.

It is a work of the Holy Spirit in a heart that is surrendered to Him. Are you surrendered? Or are you still battling because you constantly insist on your own agenda?

No, Lord, I'm going to say this anyway. I'm going to handle this my way. I'm going to think the way I want to think. I'm going to spend your money the way I want to spend it. I'm going to pursue what I want.

I, I, I. ask you in a sermon recently, would it surprise you to know that many Christians do not know that they need to pursue Christ?

Many Christians don't know that. Many Christians don't know how to pursue Jesus because their pastors don't tell them. Typically they're not in the word because they're not in a church that insists on a high view of the word and the pastors don't help the people connect the Christian life and the joy of the Christian life with sound doctrine.

[35 : 13] It's a both-and hand-in-glove proposition. You can't know the joy of Jesus apart from knowing the obedience to His commands. Isn't that what He said?

If you love Me, you'll obey Me. No, they go together. Alright, so what we're dealing with in Romans 12, 1 and 2 is this. It is an urgent appeal from Paul to his readers to pursue Jesus.

He says, I urge you. In other words, you see the word urgent coming out of that, right? I urge you. This is an urgent encouragement. That's the best way I know to characterize this for you.

This is an urgent encouragement. It's a soulful, passionate, serious appeal to holy living for the sake of Jesus. Not for your sake, for the sake of Jesus. So Paul's telling us to bring devotion to God down to the level of our everyday life.

He wants us to do this with our kids, our work, our marriage, our friends, with God's money, and all the other aspects of our daily life.

[36 : 27] Bring this devotion to Jesus into every aspect of who you are and how you live. So this is godly devotion for practical living.

It's not pie in the sky. It's not conceptual. These aren't suggestions and just decent ideas for moral living. No. We're talking about the devotion of your heart and where it goes and what is at the center of that devotion.

So this godly devotion for practical living is what my emphasis is going to be in these different lessons we're going to deal with together. And the next couple of lessons are going to focus, as I said, on the foundation of becoming more like Jesus.

because we're going to continue to talk about foundational or fundamental elements to this devotion. All right, so let's not do a deep dive into Romans 12, 1 and 2.

We just don't have the time to do that. And it's not necessary tonight. I want to emphasize a few truths in particular from verse 1. And I want to encourage you to think biblically and carefully about your own spiritual maturity as we do this little exercise together.

[37 : 42] Okay? Your own spiritual maturity. Before I ask the question to launch that section, I don't know where your thoughts are right now, but do you have a question or a comment?

Anything burning that you want to ask or get off? Okay. Let you think about that. All right. I need a nod or something.

Does this seem reasonable to track? Where? Where? So when I, the next question I'm going to ask you is, or deal with is, where your devotion to God begins?

Where does your devotion to God begin? You say, well, does it begin when I'm saved? That's a good question. Where does it begin? Now, I'm assuming here that as a Christian, you have to every day do the same thing that I do.

You have to get up in the morning and you have to make a conscious decision about where the devotion of your heart's going to track. Do you not?

[38 : 49] Some of us aren't even conscious of that. That's very dangerous. You know why? Because you have an enemy that knows how to manipulate your devotion.

And you have a world that will constantly fill in that blank for you. In other words, the world won't let you live in the vacuum of not thinking about devotion because it will fill it for you.

It will provide you with all kinds of options. And it will paint them to look really nice. And Satan will do that. And then he'll... Alright?

It's just real. That's spiritual warfare. What I'm describing now. So every single morning, we need to get up and we need to make a conscious decision to look to Christ and make sure that we do what Proverbs tells us and guard our heart so that we can flee from idols.

We can keep ourselves from God replacements. False gods that want to take that devotion away from Jesus and bring it to themselves. Whatever those things are. Okay?

[39 : 56] So where your devotion to God begins. Therefore... Oh, did I miss this one? Let me see if I missed one.

Nope. Nope. Hold on. This is probably me. 12, 9 through 21.

Spiritual growth. That comes later.

Anyway, let me just say this and then we'll see where it gets up. If you look at our text for 12, mine in the NAS reads this way.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God. Right? The word therefore takes us back into the book of Romans from chapter 1 through chapter 11, as I mentioned before.

[41 : 05] Therefore is another way of saying let me see if it... Yeah. Okay. Well, I don't remember not doing this. But I know what it is.

So... Why didn't that... I don't want to spend a lot of time... Apparently, I... I skipped over this.

I don't think I said this. When we talk about your devotion to Jesus, when we talk about growing in Christ-likeness, we use a number of ways to express that growth, that devotion, and here they are.

We talk about spiritual growth, devotion to Jesus, personal holiness, sanctification, right? You heard these words? And Greg and I use them often. Well, we use these interchangeably. These are synonyms.

All of these phrases are talking about what it means for us to grow in maturity or in conformity to Jesus.

[42 : 06] This is what we're talking about when we talk about this. Sanctification is just a shortened way of expressing in the way we're talking of using it today. In this context, sanctification has to do with you being set apart to Jesus Christ.

How God is helping you to grow in a progressively holy expression of who Jesus is in you. So God sets you apart.

He saves you, Devin, and then He sets you apart to service to Him. Sets you apart from what? From what you used to be. You used to belong to Satan.

You used to live for darkness. You used to operate in the arena of satanic deception. Now God has rescued you and set you apart from that.

And now He's set you apart to Himself to live for Him. And He trains you up and grows you in various ways and various means to be devoted to Him, to love Him, and to express His character to the world.

[43 : 13] To those closest to you. Your wife, your kids, your friends. Alright? This is what sanctification means. Now what was the next one? What it means for you to become more like Christ in all that you think, say, and do.

All of those phrases or words translate into that. I don't know why I missed that in my notes, but I did. So where does this growth in Christlikeness begin?

Therefore means consequently, because these things are so. Therefore, looking back on 11 chapters of what I've said is what I'm trying to point out to you.

And it's very clear how He does it. Therefore, by the mercies of God. By God's great mercy, that is His great compassion. This is an intensive plural.

Mercies here in the Greek is an intensive plural. And it conveys the idea of great mercy, great compassion, the intensity of it. So Paul sums up what he's told them for 11 chapters concerning their salvation in Christ by calling it all the mercies of God.

[44 : 26] By all these mercies that I've been elaborating on for 11 chapters, by all these ways I've been telling you that Jesus Christ has been made your Lord and Savior by the wonderful grace and mercy of Christ.

In all of that, for all those reasons now, present yourself back to God in thanksgiving as a living sacrifice to Him. Not a dead one.

A living one. One that's walking around and breathing and speaking and thinking and doing. And make all that living and speaking and thinking and doing a worship to Him.

It all should be an expression of worship to God. If you'll, look, I'll just do this with you real quickly, okay? We won't go through it. Romans 1, 1 through 320.

We sin because we are sinners at heart. I'm just summing this up for you. We're not going to go back and read all that. We sin because we are sinners at heart.

[45 : 31] We are all guilty criminals who've broken God's law of life with Him and with others. So we stand rightly accused and condemned before a righteous God due to sin.

The wages of our sin is what? Death. Death. Because we are guilty criminals, we deserve death for the sins that we've committed. Now, there's more that He says in this.

There's also good news in some of that chapter or those chapters in that section. But this is basically the idea that He's talking about as He presents this. You would see some of, you say, well, Jeff, where's the mercy in that?

Okay, well, let me show you just real quickly, give you an example. If you read Romans 3 and look down at verse 23, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, right?

But now look at verse 24. Being justified as a gift by God's grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

[46 : 38] That's a mercy. Isn't it? If you look at Romans 6, 23, these are verses we're all familiar with, most of us are. Romans 6, 23.

For the wages of sin is death. Alright, that's not good news. But, the free gift of God, there's the gift again, the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

That's a mercy. Alright, if you look at Romans 8, I know I'm going beyond 3, but just look. Romans 8, verse 1. Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

That's a mercy from the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, we could go on and on and on as we look at 10, 9, and 10 where people are saved as they come to confess Jesus Christ with their mouth and believe in their heart that God raised Him from the dead.

On and on and on these mercies go. So, in chapter 3, verse 21, on through 1136, then, getting close to where we are in 12, we can sum it up this way.

[47 : 51] Paul tells of mankind's way of deliverance and rescue from the sin condition which enslaves and condemns us to death. The way, then, of our freedom from sin comes to us because our sin debt to God is paid in full for us.

Alright, here's the question, friends. Who paid the debt? Right. Flat out, isn't it? Jesus paid it. So, again, here's the pop quiz.

Greg's the one that does the pop quizzes. So, I've got to do one. The pop quiz is this. When we talk about Jesus ransoming us, that means that a debt was paid to buy back.

Who paid the debt and to whom? Who was paid and who did the paying? Jesus paid it to?

Hey! There you go, bro. That's ace. They all got it. There ain't going to be no red on that paper. It's just 100% right there. Good. They love pop quizzes.

[49 : 03] Alright, I'm not buying that. Alright, look. Our death, our death penalty, look it up on the screen, has been served for us by a substitute standing in our place and of course, this person is the Son of God who reversed the way of death produced by Adam's sin.

And I'm just rehearsing these chapters with you in summary. Jesus Christ opened the way of life for us through faith in Him. Through the perfect life, sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus, we, we can be declared right with God.

Miracle. Brought near to God. Forgiven for our sins and set apart. Set apart to God as His child. Now folks, I'm just rehearsing the Gospel, right?

But we don't preach this enough. I hope we do here at Grace, but on the whole, people need to hear this plainly given.

By God's mercy to us in His Son, we live in the truth that there is now no condemnation, no blame, no judgment, no guilt, no shame for those who are in Christ Jesus.

[50 : 24] Jesus took the shame. He suffered the shame, the humiliation of the cross dying as a criminal for us. He took the guilt of all of our sin.

There is no more guilt to be suffered over that. What we feel when we sin against the Lord should be this sense in our conscience of grief and a hard or heavy burden about that.

But the guilt for all of that has been born by Jesus Christ and taken away in Him. We will not stand before God to suffer the punishment of that guilt.

I know. So this is what we rehearse to make our hearts soar in devotion to Him. You know?

You know? This is what does it. Alright? And then one more. We are gifted by God's mercy with the privilege and ability to be loved by God, to be devoted to God, and in His love to be devoted to one another.

[51 : 35] Isn't that what Romans 12 said a minute ago when I read it? Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. prefer one another in honor. And then finally, in 12.1 through the end of Romans, Paul characterizes the Christian life as a grateful response.

That is beautiful. A grateful response to God lived for His glory and honor. Why not? After all that He's told us about what God's done in Christ for us.

For if we live, we live for the Lord. Or if we die, we die for the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. This is all throughout Scripture.

Your spiritual growth in Christ is about giving, surrendering, or yielding up yourself to Jesus because He gave Himself for you. Your devotion to God is a grateful response of your heart.

That's where your devotion comes from. Your heart. To God's greatest act of mercy toward you, He gave His Son for you.

[52 : 53] So, your efforts at spiritual growth reflect your heart's thankfulness, your heart's submission, and your heart's humility to God for His gift.

And I'll say this to you at that point. Thankfulness, submission, and humility are expressions. They are evidence of devotion to God. And so, we need to get those in the right order.

We are thankful, we are submitted, and we are humble in the Lord as we rehearse the devotion that God has shown to us in Jesus.

and then we want to respond in a like devotion to Him. And we can do that because the Holy Spirit lives in us. And that's what we want.

Okay, let me bring it to a summation and then we'll finish out if you have some questions or comments about all this. Responding from thankful hearts to God's mercies in Christ to us is the golden key to our heart's devotion to God.

[54 : 10] So, we can now bring all of this together. And here's how I have paraphrased it. I urgently encourage you, my brothers and sisters in Christ, based on the great mercy of God shown to you in His Son Jesus, that you make your life about worshiping Christ Jesus your Lord in everything.

do not be conformed by the world to live by its false and deceitful wisdom, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind in the true wisdom of God, so that people will see in your worshipful life the proof, the testing, the proof of the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God for being human.

So, what is the most important life-defining truth about you that every person in your life needs to see and needs to know?

And what is, I could ask in that question, what is it that Satan wants most to keep people from seeing and knowing about the way you live, all that you think, say, and do, but particularly the way you live, the way you express or give evidence to?

Michelle? to be coming for the eternity of health over my faith.

[56 : 12] And because I realized that they need to see that because I realized that I'm indebted to follow me God and honor and all that I do and all that I do great, Michelle.

Let me sum up two thirds of that because you started with laying the foundation because I believe this then I should live it. And what I heard in that last two thirds was the word obedience.

I need to obey. Right. Right. It's just empty talk. It's hypocrisy.

Very good. Other thoughts on that? The question is, we're going to put a verse up here in just a minute. What's the most important life defining truth about you that every person in your life needs to see and know?

Mark? Three. Mark's an overachiever. God's life. Oh, amen.

[57 : 34] So you brought all these elements into a concise. You know, there's nothing like being a seminary student is ruining this man. Suzanne had the same burden.

We need to pray harder for you. Yes. Right. School turns us into these machines like this. You know, that's good, Mark.

I'm teasing you, but that's very good. I appreciate your conciseness in that, too. Other thoughts? Alonza, did you have one? Oh, amen.

That's great. What would be, let me build on that with you just for a second, because that's so good. What's a joy stealer? What are the joy stealers in the Christian life?

Complaining. Wow, she jumped right on that, didn't she? That's hypothetical. Complaining will rob you. It's a joy stealer.

[58 : 34] What else? Worry. Oh, my goodness, that's a big one, isn't it? Jealousy and worry. What are other joy stealers in the Christian life that will rob you of your joy in the Lord Jesus?

Kind of take the shine off of all these mercies we've been rehearsing that you should be thankful for. Doubt.

Yes. Oh, my goodness. Yeah. Especially if we doubt our salvation, which our sin can certainly bring that on. How can somebody who just did what I did be a Christian?

Or continues to do what I've been doing? All right. Any others? Oh, yeah. Lack of contentment. Boy, that's a challenge.

Fear. Selfish pride. That's like a compound whammy. Because we could have said selfishness and then pride, but you just put those two whammies together and just, yeah.

[59 : 42] Was there another one I missed? Complacency. No, that's very, very real. Sloth, complacency. Yeah.

All right. You're seeing now, all right, these are the very things that your enemy wants to deceive you about so that you stay religious, but you have these things going on.

And it'll rob you of your joy. And so, church and church life becomes drudgery in a way. That's a heavy word.

Let me try to make it a little lighter because it's deceptive. You keep doing it and you keep coming, but there's a lack of joy, sense of purpose. What?

A task. It's another thing I've got to get up and do. Motivate myself to, yeah, what, routine? Routine. Good. You're tracking. You see?

[60 : 43] Now, do you see this happening to people, Christians? Have you seen this in churches, church life? People start fading away. You know, these things start happening.

They start drifting. Yeah. This is why walking with Jesus is the point. And this is why your shepherds get in your business.

We're not trying to be nosy. We're not trying to be intrusive. We're trying to be shepherds. Alonzo? Good. So, there's a discipline there in your life, right?

Yeah. Excellent. Alright, let's put a verse up here that pulls these ideas together and helps us understand better how the devil and the deceitfulness of our own hearts want to work against what this is about to tell us.

Look at this. I have been crucified. I have been crucified with Christ. and it is no longer I, I, who live, but Christ lives in me.

[62 : 12] And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and delivered himself up for me.

Do you see the mercies of God in Romans 1 through 11? Chapter 11? And delivered himself up for me. Those are the mercies of God. that's what people need to see most in your life.

Does that sum it up? For the rest of the sessions that we'll have together, these lessons, I'm going to strive to make clear how God's love to us in Jesus can be best expressed by what we call and refer to as spiritual growth.

Right? This is what we're doing. Now, any other questions or insights before we close out? We've got a few minutes left. Anything else you want to talk about or know or comment or insight that you might have?

Michelle? talk about talk about There's no real kind of relationship with your intuition. It's just, I don't know, it's just kind of a hard one to grasp.

[63 : 35] Yeah. Yeah. But sometimes it's good that we feel bad about our intuition.

Right. Yeah.

But it's hard to get past feeling like we're condemned because it's heavy on us. And so what can we do?

What can we do with that sense we have of being condemned? Do we understand what condemned means in this context?

What would be another word for condemned in this context? Guilty. To condemn someone. To consider them guilty as charged.

[64 : 41] Remember who took the guilt? Who took the charge? And who paid the penalty for the guilt and the charge? Jesus. And so, Michelle, it's as straightforward as rehearsing the gospel to ourselves in that.

Not as an excuse, Paul said, may it never be. Right. Well, then let me go on sinning. Because then it becomes a greater and greater proof of the gospel. And Paul said, may it never be.

It never becomes an excuse for us to lay off of the weightiness of sin in our life. But it becomes every reason for us to approach the throne of grace and do what 1 John tells us.

That if you are faithful to confess your sins to the Lord, to call your sin what God calls it. That's confession. You use biblical terminology and you use biblical concepts to help your heart express the nature of what you've just done in the way of sin.

So we don't call adultery an affair. That's not what the Bible calls it. It's things like that. We don't rationalize, justify, and pull an eject handle to give ourselves a little way out.

[65 : 46] It's not as bad as. We call it what God calls it. That's confession. And if we do that, what does the Bible tell us God does? Faithful and just to do what?

Forgive. Fully. Thoroughly. Past, present, future. That's an established reality. Yes, thankfulness.

That gratitude. And then, of course, we look for repent, replace. You remember this? We repent. And then part of that repentance looks like now I don't just repent and say I'm sorry.

I've confessed. And now I want to replace. I don't want to continue for that sin to be what it is and to have that dominance in my life. And so I want to replace that with an obedient heart and action that actively puts me in competition for this devotion that it wants to steal away being given to the Lord.

I want to become more active, more committed to that course. Okay. What was I? What were we doing? Did I ask a question?

[67 : 04] I don't know. Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. I just opened it up. Okay. Okay. So, Alonza, you want to close us out with this one? All right? I was going to say, what got me, you said it tonight, and I heard it a couple years ago when I wrote this again, that my sin doesn't hurt anyone as much as it hurts God.

Right. Yes, good. We want to cultivate that. And that works to me. Good, Alonza. We'll hold on to that.

I think that's what drives me. Good. Does it keep your heart tender toward the Lord? Yes.

Yeah. That's good. Thank you. Yep. It's very sobering, isn't it? To know that. That, you know, if I sin against Suzanne, for example, it's bad.

It's bad enough that I sin against my wife in some way. And that that sin hurt her. And in that moment, I've had to say this to my children when I've asked for their forgiveness.

[68 : 14] I've told them things like this. What daddy was most wrong in, in the sin I just described to you, Jared, or whatever, was that in that moment, I was thinking more about daddy than I was about you.

And I wasn't allowing the Lord Jesus to show his love to you through my life because of what I chose to do toward you. And that's what makes it most wrong is what I robbed God of being able to do through me for you.

So I'm acknowledging the fact that it grieved the Lord. It was a heinous thing against the Lord, but it also had a human effect, a human impact.

And so I ask for forgiveness on those levels. All right. Well, I hope that the introductory aspect of this lesson one kind of laid some of the groundwork for what we'll do in the next session or two as we talk about this, these fundamental or foundational elements and then move into an even more practical discussion.

Again, you probably saw the outline of what it means to walk with Jesus. Guys, everything we're going to be talking about now takes a lot of what we learned in Bridges and Jerry Bridges study.

[69 : 32] If you were here, it brings it over into discussing now what does it look like for us to even more practically begin to live these things out in everyday life? And what are some of the things that are going to try to derail us from that?

OK, and it's all about worship. It's all about where we worship. Who we worship. When I say where, I'm talking about where we put our worship, where we direct it.

Because we are going to worship, aren't we? It's just where's it going to go? All right. Let's pray together. And Mark, if you don't mind, brother, I'm going to ask you to close us out.