

The Foundation of Growth in Christ: What Is Growth In Christ?

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Date: 24 September 2025

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[0 : 00] Father, we thank You for these souls that have come tonight. They've braved the rain. They've braved a hard day. They've braved a week already halfway through.

The kids, the dinners, everything going on. People getting ready to go to work. I'm just so thankful that they have made this a priority in their lives. I pray that You'll bless them tonight and that they'll always leave here thinking, you know, I'm really glad I made the effort.

It was worth it. Not just because of me or what I'm doing, but because it's Your Word and we're trying to bring it with skill. We're trying to do it in a way that makes it not only palatable for us, understandable for us, but most of all, God, because we want to glorify You.

We want to honor Your Word in the way that we sit under it, hear it, understand it, and then apply it to our lives so that we can be more like Jesus. As we talk about that theme tonight, Father, we need Your help.

We need the guiding hand of the Holy Spirit to open our eyes and show us these truths and then help us to understand how to make these truths live in the everyday of our lives. Thank You for Your grace and mercy and Your promise to do this as we look to You and depend on You.

[1 : 13] In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Beloved, here's what we want to deal with tonight, and I do want to remind you, we are taping these, but please don't let that keep you from being here.

If you can't be here, then you know that you can come back and listen if you'd like to, but it's always great when we have folks here to do this with me in person.

It's wonderful. So the foundation of growth in Christ, again, I'm emphasizing the foundation part because we're going to shift F's after the next lesson. We'll move to a different F, and I'll be talking to you more about the process involved in your growth in Christ and how to actually go about growing in the Lord.

But if you get this one wrong, the other one isn't going to work. So this is super important stuff. This lesson is answering the question, what is growth in Christ?

All right, now I'm going to stop right there, and I'm going to ask you a question to think about. This is rhetorical, so please don't answer, but think about it with me. If someone in your family or a friend or an acquaintance, someone from work, whomever, asks you to help them understand what it means for someone to be like Christ or to grow in Christ, how would you explain that, understanding that you need to do it from what the Bible says?

[2 : 43] So what I'm asking you is, how much do you know about what the Bible says in answer to this question? So that if somebody asked you, one of your peers, one of your friends, asks you to explain that, how would you do it?

Just think about it. Now I'm going to ask you a similar question. What if they asked you, what is the Gospel? What do most Christians mean when they use the word Gospel?

I keep hearing this, the Gospel, the Gospel. What is that? How would you answer that from Scripture? How would you give a biblical explanation to those two questions?

What is growth in Christ? What is the Gospel? Okay, you thinking about that? How would you start? What kinds of things would you want to make sure you included?

Alright, now I'm going to throw up a different question here. I'm going to put up a different question. Why does spiritual growth need to happen in your life?

[3 : 55] Why is spiritual growth something that needs to happen in your life? If you profess to be a Christian, then spiritual growth is a need.

Now you understand, we're making a distinction between believers and unbelievers when we talk about spiritual growth. Because unbelievers cannot grow spiritually.

Why? Because they're dead spiritually and dead things don't grow. They rot. So we are to grow in our faith.

What does that mean? What does it mean for us to grow? And why does it need to happen in your life? Here's the first reason that we're going to deal with.

Because your spiritual growth is not optional. As a follower of Jesus. To truly follow Jesus.

[4 : 53] That is, to truly be a disciple of Christ. You must grow to be more like Him by grace through faith. So you won't hear me or Greg or anybody else who ascends this platform teach that our salvation is up to us, that we keep ourselves saved, and that we are responsible to make sure that we continue to become more like Jesus on our own.

We understand that we are saved by grace through faith, and it is a work of God, not of ourselves. We also understand that we are called to grow in Christ in cooperation with the work of the Holy Spirit.

We don't cooperate in our salvation, but we do cooperate with the Spirit in our growth. Two major differences there. And if we mix them up, we get into some really bad doctrine.

So you must grow to be more like Jesus. It's not an option if you're a Christian. Then, why does spiritual growth need to happen in your life?

Because your spiritual growth is not automatic as a follower of Jesus. What I mean by that is your spiritual maturity requires spiritual sweat.

[6 : 18] You, you must commit to your growth in Christ's likeness, and you must work at your growth by grace through faith. There it is again. And then finally, because your spiritual growth is foundational to who you are as a follower of Jesus.

You're going to hear me say this in just a second. I'm going to say it several more times in different ways. You cannot grow in Christ apart from being made alive in Christ. So this is foundational to your growth.

your relationship to Jesus is the foundation for your growing in Jesus. And you can't get them reversed. Now, the lessons that we're going to have here are going to build on and explain aspects of these three core truths about your growth in the Lord.

We're going to talk about what spiritual growth is and what it's not. Now, I'm about to show you why I'm taking time to do this and why I did it in Poland.

Why I didn't assume that that room full of people, there were 130-something people at that camp. There were four churches represented. I did not assume that all those people crammed in that room for these lessons were born again.

[7 : 43] I didn't even assume that some of them who claimed to be born again were truly born again. I assumed something very different from that. And I operated on that assumption.

Now, since spiritual growth in Christ can only happen in people who are trusting in Jesus as their Savior and Lord, what do I mean? In people who have a spiritual relationship with Jesus by grace through faith, we need to rehearse the critical foundation of that spiritual relationship.

Here at Grace, we make a big deal constantly out of our relationship to Jesus. Rules are important in our walk with the Lord or God wouldn't have given us the Ten Commandments.

But we understand that the relationship that we have with Jesus makes it possible for us to fulfill those commandments or those rules out of love for Jesus.

Right? So we want to make sure we get that correct. We're not obeying the rules so that we can earn God's favor. That's works. We obey the rules because we love the Lord.

[8 : 52] And we want to be like Him. We want to thank Him in a life of obedience and show that love to Him by our obedience. This is what I'm talking about. But only saved people can do that because they're the only ones that have a saving relationship with the Lord.

Now, I want to illustrate with you why it's so important. This is why I wish so many of our folks could come on Wednesday night and we could do this together.

It's just my pastor's heart because I know from pastoring and counseling how critical what I'm saying to you right now is. And I hope whenever I preach it's a critical aspect of truth.

But this stuff is, I keep saying it, so foundational. I want to illustrate why it's so important for us to begin with this spiritual foundation as we teach about spiritual growth.

Alright? I'm going to get more and more practical as we go along. In the past two and a half years, now I want to caveat this, alright? In the past two and a half years of our ministry alone, we have seen eleven people come to faith in Christ through our counseling ministry here at Grace.

[10:03] Okay? That's pretty good. for a little bitty church, that many people in that amount of time, and that's just through the counseling ministry. I didn't include other people that we have baptized that have come to faith through other aspects of the ministries here at Grace.

Through relationships with you and other things that have happened. So I want to talk to you about this. Here is the most concerning aspect for me as a pastor about those conversions.

Each person had already professed Jesus to be their Savior. Each one of those eleven people came to us telling us they were Christians and had a story about how they became a Christian.

Each one of them. And yet, each one of them came to the point where they confessed Jesus and by faith trusted in Christ to forgive them for their sins and were baptized in this ministry.

I want to share with you what in the world. One of the reasons is, again, my pastor's heart. I'm not doing this to embarrass these folks. I'm not going to call names or anything.

[11:24] They're with us. Some of them are with us. Thank God. Literally, thank God. And I tell these people and I told them as I worked with them to baptize them, you have been prayed for by the people of this church for ten years.

So, Jeremy and Brenda and Alonza, is that it? Yes. These three people have been with me in the work we've been doing since I came to Williamsburg and it's going to be ten years in a week.

It'll be my ten year anniversary in a week here at the church. So, these people were part of a church that I came to pastor and out of that ministry that eventually dissolved, there were a core of people who wanted to continue in the philosophy of ministry and in the way we were going.

There were about forty-something of us left and so we reconstituted, renamed ourselves, rewrote the bylaws, the constitution, the doctrinal statement, the whole shebang and we had so many new people that we basically were a new church family and so we said, okay, well let's just do that.

Let's start as a new church family. So, for ten years I've been shepherding with these folks and you can hug them afterwards and thank them because they're the ones that have hung in there and kept this thing going.

[12:52] Them and about, what, five or six, seven others who are still part of this ministry. Many of them moved off for jobs so there wasn't a bunch of drama and stuff.

So some of y'all know that history for us. Now, I'm saying all of that to say we have built this entire ministry on praying for and being able to minister to folks that come into our congregation and need to sort out their spiritual life.

And we want that to be okay. We don't want people to come in here and feel intimidated by the high view of God and the high view of the Word we take and look at this and say, oh goodness, these people are way too serious for me.

We've had that. And people have actually left our church saying that. You guys are too serious about the Word. We had people leave our church within the last three months that told us we were too serious about the Bible.

It happens. You wouldn't believe this stuff. Alright. Back to what I was saying. Each of these folks that we ministered to had already professed Jesus, but each of them, now here's the important part, alright?

[14:09] Each of them came to realize that their profession was not genuine and that they needed to truly trust Jesus for forgiveness for their sins.

Okay? Some of these people are still with us. Some of these people have moved and some of these people have moved on for various reasons.

But nevertheless, this is the case with each of these eleven folks. I know because I personally ministered to them. Now there are several reasons why each of these people came to realize that their profession wasn't genuine and that they needed to trust Christ what would be for the first time.

There are reasons that that happened and I want to share some of those reasons with you. Okay? You ready? Now look at this with me and think about this with me.

First of all, first of all, the preaching and teaching of sound doctrine is one of the reasons they came to realize this.

[15:19] What am I talking about? Holding to the authority and sufficiency of God's Word without compromise. We preach God's authority from this pulpit.

We preach sin from this pulpit. We teach and preach redemption from this pulpit. We do it without compromise and without apology. We don't skate around or skirt the issues of Scripture. We preach the Bible. So we're teaching sound doctrine. That truth, sound doctrine is truth. That truth is coming into contact with anything in your life or their lives that is not consistent with that truth.

A lie? A deception, a falsehood. And it begins to expose those realities. And the longer you sit under it, the more that should happen unless you're hardening your heart.

Very dangerous. Okay? Another reason. Because of the preaching and teaching that we do here expositionally. Just think when you hear the word exposition, think expose.

[16:28] That's what it is. What we're talking about is a verse by verse through chapters and books of the Bible in their context. We're not jumping all over the place proof texting trying to make the Bible mean what we want it to mean.

We're teaching verse by verse through books of the Bible, chapters of the Bible, within the context. Matt does this when he's taught. That's why he's able to keep teaching.

I do this. Greg does this. We are very, very careful with the context of the Scriptures and we want to handle the Bible with skill. We do this with courage.

We do it with conviction. We do it with clarity and we do it with compassion. Anybody who comes to this pulpit or offers teaching in the ministries of our church, we carefully listen and watch for these things before we're ever allowing them to get into the public venue.

We vetted them from behind the scenes and then we watch and listen carefully. to make sure this is happening. Being exposed to this kind of teaching week after week helps them come into contact with the various truths of the Bible that are woven through Scripture that are going to touch these areas of their lives and continue to reinforce their need for this truth.

[17:48] Then again, preaching and teaching Jesus Christ. Specifically, the gospel of God's grace to sinners through the life, crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

This is central to everything we do because everything about Scripture's truths point to this heart, this heart reality. You'll notice these first three all deal with our faithfulness to the Word of God. The truth of the Word of God and the relationship that we're trying to help you develop with God's Word. God's Word. That's what we do here. Then, this one.

These people came to realize their profession of faith was not genuine because of the discipling ministry here at our church. We disciple believers. We do not disciple unbelievers.

Unbelievers aren't disciples. They're evangelistic opportunities. we share the gospel with them. We don't teach them in the gospel.

[18:55] They don't have the gospel living in them. So, we teach and admonish. That means warn or instruct. And encourage every person to observe all that Jesus lived and taught.

So, that's from Matthew 28. That's from Colossians chapter 1. And then other passages where this is taught. And then finally, applying the one and others.

So, what I mean here is ministering and modeling the truth of Christ to each other. So, you doing that. So, look, it's me and Greg ministering this way as we shepherd in these venues that we have. But then it's also you guys ministering this way in the congregation based on the foundation we're offering you here in this pulpit. So, you're ministering.

You're modeling the truth of Jesus to each other. So, that we all attain to the fullness of maturity and conformity to Jesus. That's Ephesians 4. This is what we're doing.

[19:57] Folks, this church ten years ago was founded on this. And each member knew this. It's why they stayed.

It's why they fought. It's why they were so faithful. It's why they're still here. Discipling people is the heartbeat and foundation of this church ministry.

And we look for various ways to disciple people and to encourage them to go out in their sphere of influence and do what Jesus said in Matthew 28, the Great Commission.

We need to win souls to Christ and then train them up to observe all that He commanded them. So, we baptize them and teach them and admonish them and train them up. That's why we're here.

And this is what the church is supposed to be. While it's not rocket science, it is an extremely difficult task to fulfill. It's an extremely difficult task to stay focused on.

[20:55] And it is very easy to get distracted. If you don't believe it, look around. Look around. Now, folks, false conversion.

False conversion is a concern that we each must have for ourselves and for other people. so that we're sober about what is at stake when we tell ourselves and others, listen, I am a Christian. Yeah, well, what do you mean by that? Do you know what you mean by that? Do you know what being a Christian is? Do you know what that entails? Do you know what that costs? There was a lot about the Christian life I didn't understand when I truly was born again. I'm one of these people who got wet when I got baptized and lived for years thinking that I was a Christian and I would have gone straight to hell if I would have died. I was not living for the Lord. And there's nothing about my life as I look back on that period of time that exemplified love for Jesus and His Word. I was still very much living for Jeff. [22 : 07] But I got wet, so I had my insurance. insurance. But it was all false. So this is a passion for me. As a pastor, this is a passion for me.

So if I have a soapbox, this probably would be it. I don't want people coming into Grace Church under the shepherding that Greg and I provide and their blood being on our hands because we didn't want to do the hard, messy work of helping them sort out their spiritual life and we just want everybody to pat each other on the back and get along. Well, of course we want that, but I don't want people in here doing that as a hypocrite. I want them to do it because they love the Lord. Because Jesus lives in them. Alright? Now, because this is such a critical aspect of the foundation for spiritual growth, I'm putting the pause button on and I want to show you something tonight near and dear to my heart and near and dear to this ministry.

What I'm about to share with you has been a critical tool that we have used to see these eleven people brought to Christ. And I want to carefully show you how it's done so you don't think I'm up here manipulating people, not that you do, or that Greg or myself are sitting down and telling people like I'll use Matt, having Matt come in and he's one of these people and so I listen to his testimony and I step back and go, yeah, dude, you're not saved.

[23 : 33] I'm not doing that. I am not doing that. I'm also not doing this. Now, Alonza, I'll pick on you. I'm also not going, yeah, you got to do the guy girl thing. It's got to be fair.

So with Alonza, it might be she shares her testimony and I step back and I go, oh, yeah, okay, you're in. You're good. You're good. I'm not doing that. I am not doing that.

Greg's not doing that. Let me show you what we do. When you give us the opportunity, this is what we do. All right. We call this the fruit or proofs of genuine salvation.

It's not it's not original with us. We tweaked this from some material that Dr. MacArthur had put together many, many, many years ago and we found out about it through through Grace Community.

If you go to 2nd Corinthians 13, I'll show you one of the verses, just one of the verses that we use in our efforts with this as shepherds.

[24 : 41] We're not making this up and we're not adding things to our ministry that make it hard for people. 2nd Corinthians 13, 5. Jeremy, are you there yet?

Okay. Yes, sir. I'm going to ask Jeremy to read this from his translation. Test yourself to see if you are in your faith.

And then in your faith. And do you not recognize this about yourself? That Jesus Christ is in you and left in you and left in you. So, whoa, now those are sobering words.

Are you there? 2nd Corinthians 13, 5. The context of this teaching here from the Apostle Paul is he is closing out this second letter that we have.

We know he wrote three. We have two of them. In this second letter, he's closing the letter by letting them know that all of the argumentation that he has made for his own apostleship being genuine.

[25 : 45] And the reason he did that was because they were giving him some grief. They had actually run him out of Corinth, broke his heart. Now he's trying to help them understand that he is there to bring them the truth.

And now he's telling them, based on what I've brought you in the truth, test yourselves. Examine yourselves to do what? What does he tell them to test and examine?

For what purpose? What's the verse say? What is it? To see if you're in the faith. Do you hear that? Now we're all supposed to do this.

We all need to do this. Because we don't want to live in deception. And he said, look, I hope what you find is that you pass the test.

That you really are Christians. Unless, of course, you do the test and it shows you, no, not really. That's what happened to these eleven souls.

[26 : 47] And I praise and thank God for it. lest they end up being the ones going in and standing before the Lord after an entire lifetime of going to church, reading the Bible and doing religious stuff, and the Lord say, depart from me.

I never knew you. I don't want that on my conscience. Travis said, that's scary stuff. It's scary thought. It's scary for me. It's scary for the people. And it ought to sober us. All right. So the genuine proves of faith, of salvation.

Now, look, as we do this together, I want you to know I brought it. I didn't print the whole thing out. We didn't reproduce it in a slide, but I want to show you. So here's the first page of this worksheet. Here's the second page. I have a ton of explanation. I'm not going to read the whole thing to you, but I have all kinds of explanation about what this tool is and how to use it.

[27 : 51] And then I follow up with them and we might spend two or three counseling sessions going through this together. So I don't want you to think this is haphazard or quick. Or I just hand this to them and say, good luck.

You know, I hope it works out. We take this very seriously. And there's there's a good bit written here. Now, I want you to look with me then what what we do here.

Look at these categories. So each of these are the themes that are on this genuine proof worksheet. So they're going to be looking at do they have a love for God?

Do they have repentance from sin? Do they have humility? Then they're going to look at do they have devotion to God's glory? When they look at their lives, do they see a life of continuing prayer? Do they see selfless love? Do they see separation from the world, spiritual growth, obedient living? And finally, do they see a hunger for God's word and a transformation of life?

[28 : 56] Now you say, Jeff, who in the world could live all that perfectly? No one. And so I explain in the sheet, we're not talking about you doing all these things in a perfect sinless way.

Here's what we're talking about. Go through your life in the last six months. Each one of these categories, we have scriptures and passages listed.

We didn't put all of them up up there. I didn't put that on my wife tonight because she's in her drug induced state. Bless her heart. But she she listed these for me and I said, leave off all the scriptures, Suzanne, you'll be here all night.

So each one of these have at least three or four passages next to each one of them. They go and they look up the passages, every one of them. I tell them, don't skip a one.

Look up every single passage and you have one question to answer. is this me? Do these things characterize my life?

[29 : 58] In other words, these aren't one offs. These aren't here and there. These aren't spit and spurt. Are these things characteristic of my life at some level?

I'm growing in them, but they are consistently a part of my life. And if I was to go to people and ask them, do you see these things in my life? It would be clear to the people closest to me.

Yes. Clear. Clear to those people. They wouldn't have to step back and go. I don't know. I don't know, man. Maybe.

It ought to be clear. Yes or no. Do you see that? That's a Christian. That's a follower of Jesus. And so you ought to be growing in these things.

You ought to be maturing. These things ought to be what characterizes your life. This is what your life ought to look like. Whether people are looking or not. Not your public life.

[31 : 01] Your life. And so we tell people, take the last six months of your life, look up every verse, and then ask yourself, does this characterize me over the last six months?

Do I have enough evidence in my life, based on these passages, that I clearly love God? And that love for God would be clear to others who are closest to me and see my life every day.

Do they see me taking my sin seriously so that they see me repenting from it? Do they see me fighting sin in my life? Do they see humility growing in my life? Do they see devotion in me?

That was the whole first session last week. Dedication to God. Devotion to God. Am I a prayerful person? Selfless? Do they see me making sure that I am staying away from things in the world and in my past and in my life that draw me away from that devotion to Jesus?

Do they see me doing that willingly? Can they say I'm growing in the fruit of the Spirit? Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, self-control. Do they see obedient living in me?

[32 : 15] Do they recognize a hunger? Do I? It's pretty serious, isn't it? Well, we're not playing games. This is the next paragraph.

When they do all that, see, look, you see all those, look at all those verses. Look at all those verses. The next paragraph, I say this, this exercise is not designed to make you doubt your salvation. It's meant to help you avoid deception and to bring you to a certain confidence in your spiritual condition. You need to know the truth about yourself because your soul is at stake.

No one perfectly lives out the qualities mentioned in these verses. However, if you are a Christian, these qualities should be clear, existing, and observable in your lifestyle over time.

And those closest to you should be able to say that they see these characteristics present and increasing in your life. Take careful note of why this exercise is so important for you to do with as much honesty as you can bring to it.

[33 : 23] Because Jesus said, not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven. But he who does the will of my Father, you're looking at it on the screen, who is in heaven, will enter.

Many will say to me on the day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? In your name did we not cast out demons? In your name perform many miracles? And then I'm going to declare to them, I never knew you.

Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness. Lord, I was religious. I went to church, I read my Bible, I served in the church, I gave money to the church, I sacrificed. Depart from me, I never knew you.

That's the issue. What do you live? What do you practice as a lifestyle? What most characterizes you hour to hour, day to day, that's what defines you.

And that is the evidence of who you truly are in relationship to God. And then I have in bold, don't be deceived. Do you see what your pastors are trying to do here?

[34 : 27] We're not trying to cause people to doubt their salvation if they're really saved. If they're genuinely saved, these verses ought to give them a certain confidence, even though they might weep with humility and say, Lord, I don't live up to any of this the way I should.

But this is the cry of my heart. See? See? That's different. Now I can tell you time and time again, and I can share this with you because I had this conversation with him.

My friend Bob, who I watched die for a month and then did his funeral. I did this with Bob because for two years, Bob told me he was saved.

And for two years, I did marriage counseling with him and his wife off and on. And for two and a half years, I walked with Bob, befriended Bob, counseled Bob, got to know Bob, and I was concerned.

And I told him that. Bob, brother, you need to take a hard look at this. He finally allowed me to need after two and a half years, he allowed me to sit down with him and use this exercise.

[35 : 46] He came back after I gave him this assignment. He came back to that next counseling session. We sat down together and started at the first one, love for God.

We looked up every verse. I said, what did you get in your notes? Blank. I said, how about repentance from sin? We didn't get past repentance from sin and he wouldn't even look at me anymore.

And I saw tears start to come and hit the table. And I'd never seen the man cry before. And I said, what's going on? And he choked out, this isn't me.

Now, now I could have just patted him on the back, befriended him, come to church, do your thing, right?

Give. Don't rock the boat. Why didn't I do that? Because I'm a pastor. Because I'm a shepherd.

[36 : 50] Because I have a responsibility to the sheep. Because I have a greater responsibility to the Lord of the sheep. And what I saw in his life did not jive.

And so I patiently ministered to him and God made an opening. And in that moment, I said, Bob, if that's not you, what do you want to do about it?

And he said, I want to be a Christian. What do you want to do about your sin, man? I want Jesus to forgive me, Jeff. He had carried shame and guilt for many, many, many, many years.

I know because I counseled with him and he confided in me. For decades, he had carried that shame and that guilt. And I said, are you ready to finally give that up to Christ?

I am. What do you want to say to him? And I said, Bob, whatever is in your heart right now to respond, that's what you need to say. You need to talk to Jesus and do business with him.

[37 : 52] What do you want to tell him based on what you know now? And so we bowed and we prayed. And he trusted Christ to be his Savior. And I baptized him.

I have a confidence in my soul that he died in Christ. He had that confidence because I went to the hospital and he said to me, keep reminding me of what I did when I trusted the Lord.

Keep reminding me of what we said, what we talked about. And he would say things like, it's all Jesus, right? It's just Jesus, right?

He'd say that laying in the bed and I'd say, yes, Bob. And I'd grab his hand and he'd squeeze it. It's all about Jesus. It's just Jesus. You see, when that man was dying, that's all that mattered.

Not how much he gave to the church or all that. Where am I with Jesus? Well, that's what we're asking. Because you can't grow in Jesus without Jesus.

[38 : 56] It's that simple. And yet, I am not the first and only pastor standing up right now and saying that the number of unbelievers in most evangelical churches are in the 90% mark.

That should shock you to your soul. I'm not the only person saying that. Other experienced pastors are saying there are many, many churches out there where they have upwards of 90% of their people that are coming who can't even tell you what the gospel is.

Folks, this is a problem. It's an epidemic. Well, we can complain and cry about it and whine about it and preach sermons about it or we can do something about it.

And so here at Grace, this is one of the tools we use to do something about it if people will let us.

And folks, as far as I know and I can't see their hearts, we have led 11 people just in the counseling ministry.

Myself. 11 people have come to know the Lord because we've taken time to help walk them through this exercise. If they're on the borderline and they're waffling, I tell them, look, what have you got to lose?

[40 : 20] If you're already saved, right? And you're not sure and you're on the, like this, why don't you cry out to the Lord? What have you got to lose?

What if you don't do it? And your foot's more in this camp over here, the one that burns instead of the camp over here with the one that is blessing? You see?

Why would we not do this? Because we're embarrassed? Because it's awkward? Because it's messy? Because it takes time? At the end of the day?

Another thing that we tell them is this. Be careful. You cannot put your trust in experiences from your past because this is what I hear in the testimonies.

Well, I've been baptized. You can't put your trust in where you were baptized, when you were baptized, how many times you were baptized. You can't do that. Baptism doesn't save you.

[41 : 26] You said a prayer and asked to be saved many times. Okay? Okay? You walk down the aisle of a church. Okay?

You talk to the pastor. You prayed with a pastor. All right? A lot of people do that. That's not what saves you.

None of that. God can use all that, but that's not what saves people. Look at this. You cannot put your hope for being truly born again in your knowledge of religion, your denomination, or even knowing the facts of the Bible.

Remember, the demons know the facts of the Bible. The demons know the religions because they created them. You can't put your hope in your religious involvement, going to church, giving to the church, doing church stuff.

You can't put your hope in feeling bad when you sin or feeling sorry you did something wrong.

Shoot, folks, there were many times in my unbelief that I felt bad about something that I did, but I was even more concerned that I not get caught.

[42 : 40] You can't put your hope in trying to be or wanting to be a good person. I'm a good person. I mean, I try to do the right thing. I don't always do it, but I think I'm pretty good.

That's not the question. That's not the issue. You can't put your hope in good things you do or have done. None of those things have anything to do with genuine salvation.

Let me go back. Those things do because we can see every single one of those in Scripture and we can deal with them from the Bible.

Okay, let me stop here and let me ask you for a response. And it may just be a one-word response. Do you understand why this is so important to Greg and I?

Okay. Because I don't want to leave here with you thinking, man, our pastors are out there trying to convince people they're not saved so we can up our numbers of salvation. That would crush me for you to think that.

[43 : 48] We are trying to do business with people on a spiritual level and it is time-consuming and it is very, very messy. But it's worth every minute. Even if I don't lead those people to Jesus, if I've left them with the truth for God to use in the future in their lives, I feel like I've won because I've been faithful.

And that's what we're after. Alright? And I thank God for every one of these people that God has allowed to come to our church and sort this out with Jesus and the difference that it's making in their lives.

I don't have any regrets at all about the time, the energy, the efforts, none of it. I thank God for it. When God used His Word to drive into the joints and marrow of these folks' souls, they came to realize two biblical truths that I want to share with you.

I think I can say this with confidence based on the conversations that I've had with each one of these people as we work through this together. They came to realize two biblical truths about the life each of them had been living as they look back on believing they were Christians when they really weren't.

And you heard this in many of their testimonies. They didn't try to hide this from you. They were very bold about this. Here are the two truths they came to realize. First, they were not growing in likeness to Jesus and in love for Jesus.

[45 : 24] They did that exercise and they realized that's not me. I'm not becoming more like Jesus and I'm not growing in my love for Jesus. At best, Jesus is kind of an afterthought in my life.

Okay? And then the second truth, you cannot have spiritual growth where there's no spiritual life. they came to realize they were not made spiritually alive.

They were not in Christ. And they realized that's the root of not growing. The reason I'm not growing as a Christian and maturing as a Christian, the reason I don't have a deeper love for God's Word, the reason I'm not more committed to the priorities of heaven as they're written in Scripture is because I'm not a Christian.

I don't have spiritual life. You see? Well, that's exactly where I wanted them to be in this exercise. If that was the case with their heart, I wanted them to see that.

So, did I have to come and say, you're not a Christian? No. I just gave them the Word and told them, do the test. And I can do that with a clear conscience because I trust the Holy Spirit.

[46 : 34] I don't have to play the Holy Spirit. I do with you, with them, what I do with you every Sunday. I stand up here and I give everything I have to preach in the Word knowing that this may be the last time I get to do it.

And that may happen one day. I may be in this pulpit on Sunday and then you guys find out in the week that I was killed and that I'm in heaven now. And there won't be Jeff in the pulpit anymore and you can say, boy, he said, he always tried to preach that sermon like it would be the last time he preached.

And he did. I hope that's what you can say. Because I don't know any more than you do when the Lord's going to take me. I can tell you this, I'm not irreplaceable.

And I don't tell myself nonsense like that. False conversions in each of these people were revealed in their lifestyles.

They looked at their lives through the lens of Scripture and they saw a lie. They never truly trusted Jesus to forgive them for their sins.

[47 : 47] Jesus didn't live in them which meant that they could never truly grow to be more like Him. So folks, listen, all I'm saying in this careful thing is this, when we encounter people here in our church and we find them struggling in some aspect of their growth or whatever, we do not automatically assume that they're not Christians.

We try to get with them and listen. We listen to what they tell us. We ask careful and crafted questions that are designed to help us listen for certain things.

Now they don't know that, but we do. And we listen. And we've done this long enough that when we hear these answers, we know whether or not more flags need to come up or we need to go in this direction or that direction.

And so we begin to sniff out and work through is this an indication, is this lack of growth a potential indication for a lack of spiritual life?

Why would I not ask that? Oh, well, we don't want to offend anybody. No, no, no. Let's do this. Let's make sure that nobody at Grace Church gets offended so that some of those people will definitely go to hell because we didn't want to offend anybody.

[49 : 10] That's not going to happen here, is it? And I'll tell you why. Because under our leadership, we're more concerned about pleasing Jesus than we are pleasing the customer. customer. They're not customers.

They're either Christians or they're not. And we need to help them with that. Spiritual death and deception can only be overcome by the grace of God in regeneration.

So here is a theological word that you need to know and understand. Devin, how long have you been a Christian? Do you think? Something like that, right?

Pretty new to the faith. So words like this, pretty new? Regeneration? Regeneration? You've heard him before?

So do you think you could have explained regeneration before tonight? Well, that's not the issue.

[50 : 24] But you could have taken a shot at it. So one of the reasons I'm pointing this out, brothers, not to embarrass you at all. I'm proud of you. And being your friend is a privilege for me. Being your pastor is a privilege for me.

I want to see you grow in the Lord. And one of the ways that we do that is what we're doing here. And so I think of you and several more people like you who've recently come to faith that need to be taught what regeneration is because that's what happened to you.

That's what happened to me. But mine was a long time ago. Yours is fresher. Regeneration is a critical, critical concept. No regeneration, no spiritual growth. Period.

Here's the verse from Titus. He, God, saved us not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness but according to His mercy by the washing of regeneration and renewing.

So there you are. Regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit. That is the work of the Spirit by God's purpose and design and decree that you would by the Spirit's power be regenerated and renewed.

[51 : 34] That has to come from God. You cannot do that to yourself. Regeneration is God's gift of eternal spiritual life bestowed on or granted to the soul of a spiritually dead sinner.

So you must be regenerated brought to life because you're a dead corpse spiritually. You cannot respond to God in spiritual life because you have no life.

so He has to give it to you and then from that life that regeneration oh God you can respond. That's how it works.

There are many many people of various denominations and beliefs who claim to be Christians but hear me carefully their lives do not show the evidence that they are regenerate.

That's a concern. they show little to no love for Jesus they do not show a growing desire to serve Jesus sacrificially and they don't do this through a repentant and obedient life.

[52 : 45] You don't see that in their life. On the whole you don't see it. You say Jeff well could they just be spiritually immature? It's a possibility and I would say it depends on how long it's been going on.

Right? If you've got somebody that's just in a season of spiritual funk. Have you ever had that you know kind of a dry spell? That happens. That's not what we're talking about here.

We're talking about people here who aren't saved and so they don't live like it even though they come to church and do religious stuff. Think about this with me.

Let me give you another passage of scripture that helps us think carefully. I've actually preached on this. You can find this online under my sermons in Mark. It's in Mark chapter 4. I may preach this again here pretty soon.

I do stuff like this and then I get all pumped up and I want to go back and preach it again Mitch.

That's just the way it is. Fire in your bones. Mark 4.

[53 : 48] And what we're talking about here is the parable of the soils. Not the sower. It's not a parable of the sower. It's a parable of the soils. Look with me and read along if you would.

I'm just going to read a few verses here beginning in Mark 4. 13. And Jesus said to them, now he's going to interpret and explain the parable of the soils.

He's going to give them the interpretation because they didn't understand the parable when he told them. Do you not understand this parable? How will you understand all the parables then?

The sower sows the word. So the sower is sowing the seed of the word of God. The truth. These are the ones who were beside the road where the word is sown and when they hear immediately Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them.

So now you see Satan's part in stealing away the truth from people's hearts. In a similar way, these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, who when they hear the word immediately receive it with joy.

[55 : 00] Now that sounds like salvation, but, verse 17, and they have no firm root in themselves, but are only temporary. Then when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they follow in a notice.

These people receive the word with joy. There's an outward joy. There's an initial freshness. you know that shiny honeymoon stage, and they have it in the Lord, and it all looks right, and we're all rejoicing, but then look, immediately, because they start living for Jesus, because of the affliction and persecution of being in the word, they start trying to live by the word, and persecution and affliction come.

And what happens when that comes? And immediately they do what? What does the verse say at the end of verse 17? Fall away.

They weren't saved. They're not losing their salvation, they were never saved. The seed never took firm root in their soul. The word of God. And so as soon as it cost them something to be a disciple, they ran the other way.

Now, verse 18, others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns. Now, these are the ones who have heard the word, but the worries of the world and the deceitfulness of riches, that is materialism, their stuff, and the desire for other stuff enter in and choke the word and it becomes unfruitful.

[56 : 46] They allow the things of the world and the stuff of the world and the idolatrous desires of their heart to choke out the truth so that it never has an opportunity to grow and flourish.

They were never saved. So they can come to church, they can throw their money around, they can say religious stuff, they can talk like us, but it's not going to be long before the price of being a Christian starts to take its toll.

And they're going to be shown for what they really are. We just had that happen in our church. You don't know about it because you were protected from it.

But we just had it happen. Spurious. False. Fake. And thank God no damage was done.

And we do, we thank God for that. this is the reality of what it means to have false confession, a false profession of faith.

[57 : 55] The only one that we have in this passage is in verse 20. Those are the ones on whom the seed of the word of God, the truth was sown on the good soil.

That is, God had prepared the soil of their heart to receive the word. That is the work that I put up here of regeneration and renewal. God had prepared the soil of their heart.

That is why this is the parable of the soils. The soils are what is making the difference. They hear the word and accept it and what happens? They bear fruit.

And that fruit is a 30 or 60 or 100 fold. But they bear it. Some are going to bear 30. Some are going to bear 60. Some are going to bear 100.

The point is they are bearing fruit and it is noticeable. It is clear. It is not hidden. Don't hide your light under a bush. The Lord said.

[58 : 54] Live it. The whole world ought to see that light. The light is Jesus. So what I want to do, and I am going to stop here and do questions and all.

I still have another half of this to go. And it is okay. What I am going to do is stop here. And then next time I am going to spend more time clarifying the spiritual foundation for spiritual growth.

And I am going to answer this. Let me go ahead and put it up there so you can see what is coming.

What happens when a person comes to believe in and confess Jesus as their Savior and Lord?

What actually happens?

Then we are going to deal with a question a little bit down below is if I am truly a Christian, why do I still struggle with sin the way I do? Why?

What is that? I want to answer that. I am going to answer that from the Bible. And we are going to talk about it. Now we don't have time to do that tonight. because I took more time talking about the other thing.

[59 : 56] Let's stop right here. What questions or thoughts or clarifications or insights or affirmations might you have as you have been thinking through this with me? How has this affected you?

How has it impacted you? Where are you? I need to hear from one or two of you. Mitch? I was still in my life. I was still in my life. The soil of the soil of good and the word.

The soil of the world. The soil of the anxiety. Whatever. The time you're trying to do it. Yeah.

Yeah. Yeah. I know I'm saying it's like you comment with it. I say sure.

Absolutely. So Paul's letters, every one of them, right? Every one of Paul's letters are written to Christians struggling with sin and the cares of the world and the issues of life.

[61 : 05] It was so bad in the Corinthians life that he had to say things to them like stop your immorality as a Christian as if you were never saved.

He had to tell them that they got saved and they they started doing immoral things that were indicative of their life before they were saved and Paul had to say y'all stop that you'd think but he had to tell them that and they were saved and he said you're saved I know you're in the Lord but you need to stop this now he could have said hey that shows you're not saved that's not what he said he'd been with them and Paul had seen the evidence of the work of the spirit in their lives apparently and so he knew this didn't match Mitch what he knew was this they had allowed themselves under some weak teaching some weak pastors that weren't really pastors to drift back into what they were living before because those men were telling them things like that you can have a foot in both camps and Paul was running them out and he was so upset about it he told them this you have two choices

I know you ran me out of town the last time and you broke my heart I'm coming back and he said do you want me to bring a rod you remember this language he said that do you want me to bring a rod because I can do that I can be that guy you want to get a spanking I'll spank you I'll bring a big stick or we can do this the nice way and you can repent he was a man's man Jesus was a man's man these guys did not play with sin they weren't afraid to look a person in the eye and say shape up Jesus his reputation is at stake here there's a lot more than your personal pleasure at stake here and your little pettiness I don't want you dragging my Lord through the mud they weren't afraid to do that so Mitch absolutely brother the entire New Testament letters are couched so that they're exposed for Paul exposing doctrine in the first half what I'm doing sound doctrine and then telling them how to live it and specifically naming names tell those two women

I can't remember their names now Syntyche and Syntyche and somebody else tell those two women to stop it and get their spiritual act together and get forgiveness from each other and get on with the rat killing here he named names I mean I don't even do that most of the time unless it's a false teacher then I'll name them good question yeah for eternity how'd you like to be in heaven and go let's not read that passage in heaven alright good question Mitch the seriousness of it is we fight sin and this is why we so I didn't get to it so I have in here I have in here as I was going to end some points that I want to show you of what is important in our lives that help us deal with sin what God has given us to help us do that and I have this little list and one of them is sitting around you in this room the church we get in trouble when we live so busy we live as islands when we don't make stuff like this a priority and

Satan chips away at us and discourages us and the world certainly doesn't do us any favors does it brother the world is constantly preaching at us to follow its nonsense yeah yeah yeah and let me don't watch the news every day you know tune in once a week once every two weeks listen for a little while turn it off walk away you know it used to be before all this media stuff it used to be where you had to go sometimes you had to go a month or months before you get up dates and you know what was news three months ago it's not news now and so you get and so if you had just waited three months you'd have saved yourself all that anxiety because what do they do every day every piece of news is earth shattering world changing monumental this will shape the future for three decades and I go no it won't no it won't give it three months and it'll be something else shaping the world for three decades yeah there you go all right other

[66 : 17] Alonza I was going to say I love this is one of my favorite parables because I also related to the progress with him and all the things the fact that they Jesus tells it we're going to have all

these troubles and trials he doesn't say that life can be easy so yesterday I got messed up noticing about my surgery and the anxiety came in and I thought Lord get him out of here I can't deal with this good for you Alonza I think that's when you know that you may think that you're walking on the rocky soil but you're not you're just walking so well on the other soil that Satan doesn't want you to but you do whatever he can to make you think that you're not doing it well and I've been to that it's real the Lord said do not let your heart be troubled believe in

God believe also in me in the world you're going to have tribulation but I have come to overcome the world so again what does it all circle back to in these comments it all circles back to a relationship with Jesus Christ if we don't put the premium on being in a relationship with Jesus we're missing the point of why we have a Christian life it's to become more like Jesus and as we do that we model for the world the love character heart mind will of God that's what they need to see they don't just need to see Jeff's life squared away they don't even need to see Jeff's life different they need to see Jesus Christ in Jeff's life and it needs to be clear now they may walk up to me and go what's the diff with you man and I may have to say Jesus and then maybe they'll give me an opportunity to tell them but if they hung out with me long enough I hope they'd see man everything you say and do is about

Jesus isn't it I said well you're not with me 24 7 so I can't say yes to that I want to! sure yeah sure so let me put it this way Alonza because that's such a good point you know we don't want to fall apart all right and so maybe people would say I can't believe you're not falling apart you know I'd be falling apart and you're not and I hope you can say it's because of Jesus it's not easy I'm not saying it's easy or there's the other you fall apart that happens to Christians but then you see the Lord restore you because that's what he promises in the Psalms you will not fall headlong a headlong fall is a fatal fall headlong! headlong you'll stumble but he will hold you back from headlong and so you might fall apart but then the Lord puts you back together and he does it rather quickly because of your repentant heart and then people look at that and go I don't know how you did that and you can say Jesus but we just keep coming back to the same answer don't we there really is and he said that himself I am the way the truth and the life and we believe that here and we want to stand on it and encourage each other in it because the world!

yeah boy that's just proven every day do yes and he'll perfect it so this is why I'm taking time to talk about spiritual growth in the way of the foundation the salvation that God brings to you is the basis it's the foothold it's the foundation for your growth and so be confident in that and know about it and understand it and be able to talk about it you need to be able to talk about what you believe in and what defines you if the gospel and Jesus define you you need to be able to biblically defend that you just need to be able to explain to people why Jesus is your foundation all right okay well so so much more!

[71 : 16] to do and deal with such good passages man so excited about this but we'll wait till next time Lord willing and look here's the deal and I mean this I'm not trying to be cute up here about this I always get in trouble if I try to do that so I learned a long time ago if I go to heaven before I get to preach on Sunday and I can't come back here next Wednesday and finish this my wife if she doesn't go with me if she Lord leaves her she knows where my notes are and so I got back up we're raising them up I got Greg Greg Derek you could do it Derek could do it Jeremy could do it I know I've known Jeremy for 10 years he's a godly man and I love him with!

my heart these men could get up here and do this so you just know God's got your back he loves you and he has your back and grace church is bigger than any man or any person and if it's God's will for grace church to go on he'll keep it going on and it'll please him all right dear friends dear brothers and sisters let's pray together and thank God for this wonderful truth for these genuine proofs of salvation that we all enjoy and then let's live the rest of this week for the glory and honor of Christ father thank you for these precious friends who come out tonight to hear me probably preach more than teach but I thank you nevertheless for their hearts their souls for you I thank you for the people in here that I see who come to know Jesus people who were delivered from the deception of thinking they were born again coming to know now that they truly are saved they truly have come to help them to walk with you and grow in you and live in the excitement enthusiasm of what it means to know

Jesus to know Christ and to be promised heaven that the worst that could happen to them now is physical death so that they are brought into the presence of Jesus so thank you for this win-win that we all have as a promise in you I pray for all of the young people in this congregation all of our kids

as they are continuing to grow into adulthood that they would embrace Jesus by faith that they would truly come to salvation and a certainty of hope for heaven and not waste their lives on themselves so deliver them God and save our kids and we pray Father that you'll use us this week to speak!
the gospel into other people's! In all these things we thank you for being our Jesus in your name we pray Amen