

- ***READ II Peter 3:10-18*** In what many believe is one of his last letters before his death, the Apostle Peter concludes the letter of **II Peter** with an admonition for the reader to be sure that he or she is ready for the day of the Lord. He warns that this day would come suddenly, as a thief in the night and that this world would be changed completely. Everything that is known by man will be burned up, and the faithful must look towards the promises of God for new heavens and a new earth. Those who would be able to live with a mindset of hope and anticipation for this day would be those who live in such a way that they are found by God *"in peace, spotless, and blameless."* They would be the people who gave every effort to be prepared by being sure to *"grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."*
 - The world has lasted to the point where these words are applicable to every person who reads them today. We still await that day of the Lord, and while we might not know when it will finally arrive, we do know that we too can take measures in order to be prepared. We, too, must be a people who live in such a way that we, too, can *"be found by Him in peace, spotless, and blameless."* But the same requirements demanded by Peter of these brethren still remain for us. We, too, must be a people who constantly seek to *"grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."* So the question each of us needs to be asking ourselves this morning is, *"Have I grown?"*
 - Wednesday night, I took the opportunity in the invitation to focus our minds on the subject of self reflection and evaluation. It is customary for many people, as the year draws to a close, to take some times to look back and reflect upon the past year. This is a good and useful practice, especially for Christians who are truly concerned with their spiritual well-being. The Apostle Paul says that the only way we can know if we are truly in Christ is if we take some time to examine and test ourselves. **(II Corinthians 13:5)** So this morning, in an effort to help each of us to see the importance of self reflection for the purpose of being ready for that day of the Lord, let's consider the question of if we have grown over the past year. Let's begin by recognizing that this is worth our time because God expects us, as we just saw in **II Peter 3:18**, to be a people who are growing.
- I. Our God expects for us to grow.**
- A. Back in **v.17**, we see the statement by Peter, *"knowing this beforehand."* This statement concerning our knowledge of the coming of the day of the Lord is what brings about the demand from God that we be a people who are growing. From God's perspective, if a person wants to be someone who is going to be ready for that last day, then that person will be someone who is growing and maturing in his or her faith.
 - B. I'm convinced that these closing statements are not just an afterthought as if this suddenly popped into Peter's mind at the close of this letter, but the fact is that this letter opens with Peter admonishing the reader to be someone who is focused on growing. **(II Peter 1:1-11)** This letter which was written *"to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ."* This letter was written to disciples, and after Peter extends pleasantries, he goes right into a reminder to these brethren that *"precious and magnificent promises"* had been extended to disciples who had *"escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust."*
 - C. So what was to be the natural outgrowth of them having received these promises and having been delivered from this world? Peter says that for these very reasons they were to grow in their faith and character. They were to build upon their faiths by adding moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. I certainly don't believe this list to be exhaustive, but I am sure that this paints a pretty clear picture for us that disciples are to be people who grow in their faiths. God demands that His people be a growing people who are kept from stumbling, yet the opposite will be true if we fail to grow.

II. Our lack of growth is detrimental to our faith.

- A. Back where we began in **II Peter 3**, we see in **v.18** that the readers were to be on guard for a reason. They weren't to be cautious just for caution's sake, but they were to be cautious so that there would not be "*carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness.*" They could be steadfast if they were growing and becoming strong, but their failure to do so would only lead to their ruin.
- B. We can look to a well known text in **Hebrews 5 & 6** that paints for us a very clear picture of why it is so important that we be a people who are seeking to grow. In **Hebrews 5:11-6:6**, we read of what happens when disciples fail to see the importance in their own growth. As the Hebrew writer is seeking to explain to the recipients some deeper things concerning Jesus, he has to pause and recognize that they will probably not be able to grasp these concepts because they had become dull of hearing. In fact, he goes on to say that by this time they should have been teaching others, but instead they were still in need of others to teach them the things that would be considered the milk of the word. They were not ready to hear and digest the mean of God's Word.
- C. The writer wishes that they were ready to understand and act upon these things, but instead they were in need of still learning and grasping the elementary principles of God and Christ. Someone might say that this is not a big deal...maybe they were just slow learners, but notice that their problems stemmed from something they could control. They had allowed themselves to become dull of hearing, and it was leading them to a terrible place. Notice that the writer then goes on to talk about those who had been Christians, yet they had turned away from God...where do we think that began? Let me suggest that it began with them not believing in the necessity of growth.
- D. The truth of this matter is that we are never truly staying in the same place, but that's what most people would like to believe. They would like to think that they are good right where they are and that they can just tread water from here on out. This is just isn't the case. Instead, life can be likened more towards walking up a downward moving escalator. It's tough and it takes effort, and if we stop moving forward and upward then we will start regressing and moving backward. Every day that passes is a day for growth, and when we choose to waste that day and its opportunities then we have become weaker from those missed opportunities. Instead of being able to stand firm and not stumble, we have set ourselves up for failure.
- E. I don't think it is any coincidence at all that inspired writers, when speaking about growth, often point out what happens when growth isn't pursued. Back in our original text of **II Peter 3**, notice that **vv. 15-17** speak to what happens to those who are not growing. Peter says that they will be "*carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from (their) own steadfastness.*" The couple of verses before speak to some of the things that Paul wrote and how people could twist those teachings in such a way that they bring about their own destruction. What type of people would this happen to? Peter says it would happen to those who were untaught and unstable. Disciples who are committed to growing in their faith will be no such things! Growth is of the utmost importance, and we need to be asking ourselves if we are growing because we see the danger of not doing so.

III. True growth takes real effort.

- A. To this point, I think the decision seems to be pretty clear as to the question of whether or not it is important for us to be busy seeking growth in our faiths. I believe we also see the importance in taking time to examine whether or not we have grown, but we also need to recognize that simply because we see the need for growth doesn't automatically mean that we will be actively growing in our faiths. We must recognize that growth takes concerted effort to achieve that goal.
- B. Back at the beginning of **II Peter**, we see an awesome result of our growth. If we will grow then we will be put into a position where we will be fruitful for the Lord (**II Peter 1:8**) and we will not stumble. (**II Peter 1:10**) However, it bears pointing out that there is a word that is used twice in this context that is demanded if we want to grow...that word is diligence. (**II Peter 1:5,10**)

- C. If we want to be a people who experience real and legitimate growth in our faith and character, then we must be a people who are willing to work hard and put in real effort to grow and become better. If we do this, the Paul indicates that the results will not only be obvious to ourselves, but others will take notice, as well. Twice in his two letters to Timothy, Paul encourages his young preaching brother to be very diligent and purposeful in his growth as a disciple and leader. He tells him to *“take pains with these things (his gifts); be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all.” (I Timothy 4:15)* Then he reiterates the need for diligence in **II Timothy 2:15** when he tells Timothy to *“be diligent to present (himself) approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.”*
- D. Remember back to **Hebrews 5:13,14**...those brethren were rebuked for not being able to understand the ins and outs and rights and wrongs of God’s Word. Here, Paul is telling Timothy that if he wants to be able to rightly handle the Word then he must put in the time to grow. He must put in the effort. Now, someone might say that Paul is telling Timothy to do it for his own glory...*“do it so that people will see your work, Timothy,”* but we know that just isn't the case. Paul is simply recognizing that the work we put in to grow will naturally be noticed by others. If we are consumed in our efforts to grow spiritually in our faith and character then people will take notice. Our growth and therefore our efforts to grow will truly be obvious to all including ourselves when we look back and see if we have grown or not. So when we take the time to do so, in what areas ought we to be looking for growth?

IV. In what way should we be growing?

A. Love For God

A. This area of life is what fuels everything that we do and determines who we are. Our love for God can be measured in our devotion to Him and His will. If I love God, then His will will determine how I go about my life from a day to day basis.

B. My love for God will be seen in my devotion to His Word. It will be seen in my willingness to forgo my own desires in order to conform to His will. It will be seen in my devotion to assembling with the saints and dedicating time in my day to focusing on those things that are spiritual in nature. As we think back to the last year, how committed have we been to God, and can we say that we have grown in our love for Him?

B. Love For One Another

A. But it isn’t just our love for God that should be growing, but our love for one another should be growing day by day. Of course, these two things go hand in hand seeing as how they are the two greatest commandments. **(Matthew 22:36-40)** To love God and to love our fellow man... these are the foundational blocks that our lives must be built upon.

B. So over the last year, have we seen our love for one another growing? When we are making decisions, do we first consider others? Have we seen ourselves truly devoted to one another, and have we sought out and taken advantage of opportunities to serve one another? Those who refuse to grow are short sighted and only think of themselves, but those who are seeking to grow as God would have them to grow make a strong effort to seek for the good of others.

C. Biblical Knowledge

A. Think back over the past few months and years and ask yourself if you have grown in your Biblical knowledge. Have there been times earlier in your life when you were posed with a spiritual question and you weren’t able to answer, but you know that if asked that same question today that you could answer? If you see this in your life then you are doing exactly what God expects for you to be doing. He expects for us to be growing in our Biblical knowledge because it will only help us in our faith and in helping others to develop their faiths.

B. But this growth doesn't simply happen because you've been a Christian for another year. It only happens when we are willing to put in the time and effort to read and think upon the Word of God. There is a reason Paul told Timothy to be diligent and immerse himself in the things of God, and it was so that he would be able to know God's Word and handle it more aptly. Our Biblical knowledge doesn't automatically grow with time, but it grows when we put in the work to know God's Word better.

D. Wisdom

A. Going right along with our Biblical knowledge is our wisdom that we gain from knowing God's Word. Have you seen over the past year a growth in the way that you have approached and handled different situations? If you have noticed that you handle things better than you have in the past, then it very well could be because you have put in the effort to know God's Word and to apply the wisdom that comes from it.

B. I would really hope that after a year of focusing solely on the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, that each of us feels as if we have grown in wisdom. I hope that we have seen that we are able to handle and even avoid problems that might have troubled us in the past because we are applying God's wisdom from above in our lives. There is so much that can be gained from the consideration of the Bible's wisdom literature, and that is only multiplied when we consider the rest of God's Word. I hope that as we move forward focusing on others parts of God's Word that we will all see growth in our Biblical knowledge and wisdom that can come from those considerations, as well.

E. Grace Of Our Lord

A. Then finally, we must recognize our need to do exactly what is said in **II Peter 3:18** and grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord. But what does it mean to grow in grace? Let me suggest that our growing in grace will be seen in the way we carry ourselves as disciples in this life.

B. In **Titus 2:11-15**, we find the Apostle Paul reminding Titus that God's grace has appeared and that it teaches us in what areas we ought to be growing and improving ourselves. No longer will we live in ungodliness and world desires, but we will now live sensibly, righteously, and godly. No longer will we perform lawless deeds, but we will instead be a people who have grown to be zealous for good deeds. In doing these things, we will grow from being someone that people ignore for our foolishness, and instead we will be someone that others will have to take notice of for our God behavior. All of these areas are areas in which we must take consideration as to whether or not we have grown in the past year.

What a wonderful experience it is to look back and recognize that we truly have grown over the past year! It is a great feeling to know that our hard work and dedication to God has produced within our lives fruit that will benefit us in the years to come. However, let's be honest and recognize that it isn't always fun to take a look back because we might recognize that we haven't used our time wisely. Maybe we haven't grown as we should have. If we sit down later on today or this week and we recognize that we haven't grown and that we still are in need of spiritual milk, then let me encourage you not to just give up. Don't give up, and throw in the towel. Instead, let me encourage us to recognize that we have the ability to not let a year from now be the same as today. We can be a people who are growing and maturing and becoming stronger for our Lord. I know we can do this because we serve an all powerful God who can and will strengthen those who seek to grow. So let us all be dedicated to growth within ourselves so that we can truly grow and be ready for that day of the Lord when He appears to take His faithful home to heaven with them. Let's close by asking God to help us to grow.

PRAYER *Holy Father...we approach Your throne of grace and mercy this morning recognizing that you are a God who expects for His people to be a growing people. We pray that You would help each of us to see the importance of growth within ourselves so that we would seek your power and strength to help us to accomplish this goal. Help us to grow in our love for You and those who have been created in your image. Help us to grow in knowledge of Your Word and Your wisdom. Help us to grow in the amazing grace that has been extended to us. Help us to have our lives changed by your grace, so that we might be made to be more like your Son. Help us, Father, to always seek your will and if there is one here this morning who needs to take the ultimate step of faith by obeying the Gospel, we pray that one would have the courage to do so. Thank you so much for your love, and may we always abide in it. In Jesus's name we pray...amen.*