

Spring Training - part 2 **Grow and Go**

Mark 4:1-20

1. Grow with Jesus.

2. Grow with others.

- *Ephesians 4:11-13, 15-16; Matthew 28:19-20*

3. Grow a legacy.

love.learn.live.

westvalleychurch.com



West Valley Church
4/28/24
Casey Wilkerson

Spring Training – Part 2

Grow and Go

Mark 4:1-20

I was so excited when Pastor Mike shared the idea for this series. I love baseball and two of my sons play it and I played it, I even love watching it. So, I was excited to connect three of my favorite things – Jesus, baseball, sunflower seeds.

Every year in the spring, professional baseball players (and hopefuls) head to the warm weather of Arizona and Florida to prepare for the upcoming baseball season. At spring training, players work on the fundamentals – throwing, hitting, catching, fielding, etc. No matter how long the players have been in the major leagues, they still have to go over the fundamentals. If it's true in baseball, it's certainly true in our Christian life. This series is an opportunity to return to the fundamentals of our faith to ensure that we continue to grow... no matter how long we've been a Christian.

In baseball, each professional team also has minor league teams. These players are not good enough to play on the professional team, or not good enough yet. They are usually younger, and inexperienced. The Mariners have minor league teams in Washington, California, Arizona, Arkansas and even the Dominican Republic. So the players on those teams get to continue playing and training with the goal of working their way up to the Mariners someday. But when you get to spring training, you have the best players, and ones that will be playing on the minors teams. The best players know that they can't just help themselves. And the best coaches, know they can't just help the best players. If they want the team to succeed, they also need to help others grow and develop, and mature, and get better.

The same is true in our faith. Pastor Div mentioned last week how every good player needs to evaluate themselves and what they need to work on and improve on. How we need to go to God, so he can help us evaluate where we are and how we can become more like Him. But in addition to focusing on ourselves, we need to invest in others. We need to disciple and mentor others. Jesus commands His followers to “go and make disciples” so we need to grow in faith, and go help others grow. GROW AND GO as we grow in our faith; we help others grow too. One of the fundamentals to following Jesus is that we need to be mentored in our faith, and we need to mentor others.

A mentor is an experienced and trusted adviser. Although the word “mentoring” doesn't appear in the Bible, Scripture does give us numerous examples of mentoring. Moses mentored Joshua. Eli mentored Samuel. Naomi mentored Ruth. Paul mentored Timothy. Elizabeth mentored Mary (Mary lived three months with her). And the greatest example of mentoring was Jesus. He mentored the twelve disciples (group and individual mentoring). He taught them and lived with them to help them learn and grow in order to prepare them

to go. Jesus knew that the church would grow because of the disciples. Our Scripture for today is when Jesus taught a crowd about the importance of learning and growing in faith.

The Parable of the Sower – Mark 4:1-20

Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times." Then Jesus said, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear." When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that, "they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!"

Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? The farmer sows the word. Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown."

Thank you for standing. You may be seated.

In this chapter, there is multiple lessons on mentoring and discipleship. The first one we need to know before anything else, is that Jesus is our teacher, mine, and yours. We need to...

1. GROW WITH JESUS.

We may have, mentors and people who help teach us, but Jesus is our teacher. Our mentors that teach us about Jesus should be an example for us of Jesus. That doesn't mean they are perfect, they aren't Jesus. Neither does it mean we are perfect when we mentor someone else. We are to be an example of Jesus to others, but we aren't Jesus.

The crowd had heard about Jesus. Jesus was spreading the message of God, the seed, everywhere He went. The dirt is the people listening to Jesus. The people in the crowd

could represent all types of dirt from Jesus' parable. Some may have been shallow in their faith. They just wanted to see a miracle, or get free food, some of them may have been dragged to see Jesus. Some may have been ready to accept Jesus' message, but they also had lots of weeds to deal with. In the same way, many of us show up as a crowd to church, to experience God and worship Him. Some may have been dragged here or aren't quite sure why you decided to come. You may have weeds or rocks you're dealing with, and you want God to clean it up so you can really grow. One major difference between the crowd we read about, and all of you. They came to hear Jesus, and I am not Jesus. But it's my job to make sure we grow with Jesus. He is our Lord and our teacher, and as we grow with Jesus, we understand that God loves us and wants us to continue to learn as we follow Him. Discipleship can be limited in a setting this large. It's hard to remember everything that gets said. Some people take notes. Sometimes it's hard to process what I should do and how a message relates to me. Sometimes it's tough to hear one thing and be thinking about it but still pay attention to the rest of what is being said after that. Being here to learn, or worship, or both, or whatever reason you chose to come, is good that you are here. But following Jesus is more than just attending a church service once a week, or once a month, or less. The disciples were with Jesus all the time, but even they still had questions. Not everyone in the crowd understood the point of Jesus' message.

So Jesus teaches the crowd, but he gives a confusing message about dirt and seeds. After Jesus taught the crowd, he explains the parable in detail to a small group of followers, his disciples. The disciples were always asking questions, about what Jesus taught. That's one benefit to being in a small group. Learning from each other. An important part of growing in our faith is that we...

2. GROW WITH OTHERS.

Ask questions and challenging each other to think and grow. The group leader leads the discussion, they are not the teacher. Who is the teacher? Jesus. One way Jesus taught was to ask questions. The small group leader leads the discussion. Leading a discussion is a lot easier than having all the answers. Sometimes the small group leader isn't even the smartest in the group. I am a small group leader, and I thought maybe someone in my group would chime in. If you have thought about being in a small group, you should know that we need more small group leaders. As the small group leader, you are the discussion leader, you're not the teacher. Being in a group is a way to grow, and grow with others.

On a baseball team, you have smaller groups to help you grow too. We learn from the head coach. But the head coach also has other coaches to communicate the plan and the goal for the team. Position coaches, outfield coach, pitching coach, etc. that mentor their smaller group of players. The best teams don't just have a good head coach, but they have good position coaches to help the players in their specific areas. We are all connected as church, but many of us are in different life stages and need to grow in different areas.

While it's true that coaches, coach. In the early church, we can't overlook the fact that discipleship was everyone's job. The members of the early church took their responsibility to make disciples very seriously.

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors, and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.... speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Ephesians 4:11–13, 15–16)

We are all part of the church, and we are all part of the work God is doing around us.

The best baseball teams do not just have good coaches, they have players helping other players. It's not the job of the older players to help the younger. But if they care about the overall success of the team, everyone will help everyone. The team succeeds when everyone is growing and getting better, together. When we grow in our faith and help others to grow, the church is better too. We grow into a better representation of Jesus to our community.

In high school I was the leadoff hitter, it was part of my job to get one base. If I got out, I would tell the next few hitters, what pitches I saw, what it was like, did the fastball move etc., how well do you see the ball coming out of the pitcher's hand. I rarely got out, but when I did, I would go back the dugout and tell my teammates what it was like. Hopefully that would help them not get out like I did. It would be easy for me to sulk, or go back to the dugout and complain and give excuses for why I didn't do better. Or, I could go back and mentor someone else to do better so my team could learn from my experience. Whatever we experience in life, we grow from it, and we can then help others grow from our experience too.

In the parable, Jesus tells the crowd about corn seeds, obviously, has ears let them hear. Stock? Corny joke. The seed in the parable is God's Word. His message of love, hope, redemption, and forgiveness for us. God's Word is for everyone! But why did Jesus say he speaks in parables so that the outsiders won't understand? Sounds exclusive to me.

The outsiders Jesus is talking about, are the people who choose to not follow Jesus. The message of Jesus is for everyone, but not everyone will choose to believe it. If I tell you a baseball story, and I use baseball terms like walks, runs, barks, like four walks equals a run. Or four walks and a bark is two runs. You may be confused if you do not know baseball. These parables are confusing if you do not know Jesus. The other fundamentals we will discuss in this series don't make sense for an outsider who chooses not to believe. Reading our Bibles, going to church, prayer, only makes sense for someone who loves Jesus and wants to follow Him. Jesus' message of love, hope, redemption, and forgiveness for us. God's Word is for everyone!

Jesus didn't just come to speak about it, He lived it. He showed the disciples so they could live it. Before he left, he gave them (and us) this final command.

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."
(Matthew 28:19-20)

We learn God's Word, and as we learn, we use what we learn to leave a legacy for others to follow. As we grow with Jesus and grow with others, we...

3. GROW A LEGACY.

The seed is planted everywhere. God Word is for everyone, but the seed is designed to grow and duplicate. The message of Jesus is not something we come to church to just receive but reproduce. God's message, His love, doesn't stop with us, it spreads through us. Just like it did with the early church.

Most Christians can give a number of reasons why they cannot or should not disciple other people: "I don't feel called to minister." "I just have too much on my plate right now; I don't have time to invest in other people." "I don't know enough." "I have too many issues of my own. I'll start once I get my life in order."

As convincing as these excuses may seem to us, Jesus's commands don't come with exception clauses. He doesn't tell us to make disciples unless we're busy. Or until the kids move out. He doesn't call us to love our neighbors unless we don't feel prepared.

The disciples could have given excuses for not carrying out this command. Like not wanting to die. The early church would risk their lives to spread the message of Jesus. Risk their lives to spread the seed. We may be uncomfortable, but our lives are not at risk for helping someone grow in their faith.

Jesus commands us to look at the people around us and start making them into disciples. Obviously, we can't make anyone do anything. Our church mission statement isn't, "make people saved from their sins", we don't save anyone. Jesus saves, it's our job to introduce people to Jesus. If we are going to make disciples, we are going to use our words and actions to help others see how wonderful Jesus is. They see our love and light in the world of evil and darkness, and they will want what we have, Jesus.

The command Jesus gave his followers, he gives to us. Jesus said he would be with us to the very end of the age. And the discipleship process is one we never "finish". It's much like raising a child: though there comes a day when they are ready to be on their own, the relationship doesn't end. They don't need to be shown how to tie their shoes, but they need to learn from you in other ways. Guidance and encouragement are still needed but in different ways.

Baseball players move and get traded every year which makes the team relationships change. Coaches too. I transferred schools in college, so my freshmen year coach was different than my sophomore year coach. For all of us, some seasons of discipleship and mentorship looks differently. It could be our kids, people in a small group, someone at a new job, or our new neighborhood. God brings new people into our path, giving us fresh opportunities to grow and help others grow.

The seed is always being planted. In good dirt, growth is always happening. So, what are you letting grow in your life? The seed? The message of Jesus? Is it growing and spreading? Or is there worry and stress and doubt and other things growing in you that can keep the

seed from growing? That can keep the message of Jesus from spreading. God wants to use you to spread His Word.

The best baseball players want to grow and leave a legacy for people to remember them by what they did and how great they were. We need to leave a Legacy in faith too. Disciple making, and mentoring others is a way for us to leave a lasting impact on our community. What are you growing? What are we going to be remembered for?

Last week, Pastor Div talked about the fundamental of going to God. God needs to search us in our hearts before we go to others. So let's end today by asking God to search me and show me in the area of discipleship and mentorship. Show me who I can grow with. Show me who I can help grow. Is the message of Jesus spreading because of me?

Prayer

Let me close our time together with these final words of Jesus in Matthew:

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."
(Matthew 29:19-20)

God is with you always. So, let's go and do what he has commanded us to do. In your words and actions, let the community see Jesus in you. Let the message of Jesus spread because of West Valley Church, because of you.