

MODULE 2

Exploring Christian Growth



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Exploring Christian Growth

When we use the metaphor of ‘growth’ to describe the process of becoming more like Jesus, we are reminded of organic, biological, agricultural images. Throughout Christian scriptures we have these images of plowing, seeding, planting, feeding, watering, pruning, and harvesting. In an agricultural story like that, in Matthew 13, the soil is equated with our human spiritual receptors. The good news of Jesus is like a seed being planted in our spiritual receptors. The question for us in this series of discussions is: how do we contribute to the growth and nurturing of that seed in our lives? Let’s understand, the seed does its own God-thing, but it can be encouraged by the feeding, watering and pruning that we allow or encourage.

The Christian community over thousands of years has affirmed some basics regarding this nurturing process. God is the sun and the rain – but, we have the power within ourselves to expose our spiritual soil to those nutrients, or not. So Christians have said there are three disciplines which form the *regula* – **Basic Rule**, of Christian spirituality, without which we will shrivel and die:

- gathering for regular, corporate, communal **worship**,
- reading and reflecting on what God has already communicated to human beings (Christian **Scriptures**)
- and **prayer**, or conversation/dialogue with God.

In the first discussion series we talked about the foundational role of Scripture and Prayer in our spiritual lives. In this second series we will first of all look at the role of Christian worship. But alongside these primary disciplines, the Basic Rule of Christian spirituality, we find other spiritual disciplines that Christians have found useful for spiritual growth and development. We will discuss here the disciplines of: confession and repentance, small groups, and generosity. There are other disciplines as well: fasting, Sabbath-keeping, retreat, journaling, pilgrimage, meditation, etc.

Author and pastor, Eugene Peterson, suggests that once the **Basic Rule** is functioning in our lives, then each of us must develop expertise so that we can call up any one of these other disciplines as it is needed and set it aside when it is no longer needed. Discipline must be customized to the individual. *“There are no dittos among souls.”*

If God supplies the nutrients for our growth -- those Spirit-graced truths beyond our grasp – then we are responsible to keep the soil receptive via the Basic Rule (communal worship, scripture, prayer); and sometimes we may need the help of a hoe, a rake, pruning shears, or compost heap – the other spiritual disciplines.

Session one: *Spiritual Discipline #3 – Learning to worship God (corporate worship)*



Getting to Know One Another

- Tell us about a book you have read in the last couple of months?
- Are you more task-oriented, or people-oriented?

Theme introduction

When Christians say “we want to worship God,” what pictures come to your mind?

TEXTS: **Worshipping God together**

The word ‘worship’ in the English language has several implications that refer back to ancient times. It can speak of something or someone who has worth and therefore is worthy of worship. So we praise God because God is worthy of our praise – it’s the right thing to do. In the Bible, people often bow down before a king, because they are remembering their place as subjects, and so they bow down while the king sits above them. In this case worship involves realigning ourselves with God who should occupy the place of priority in our lives.

Revelation 4:9-11; 5:13-14

1 Corinthians 14:26-40

Discovery Questions

- What jumps out at you as we read through these passages?
- What statements encourage or challenge you?
- What questions do you have about what you have read?
- What does this passage teach us about God?
- What does this passage teach us about ourselves?
- If we believe this passage is from God, what will we do differently this week?

Wrapping Up

- What pictures do you have in your mind for “*worship*” now?
- When we speak of worship as a “*discipline*”, what do you think that means?

Meditation text

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Prayer

Session two: *Spiritual Discipline #4 – Learning to confess and repent (messing up and recovering)*



Getting to Know One Another

- Take something from your wallet or purse and tell us how it relates to you.
- My parents disciplined me as a child by...

Theme introduction

A Christian author has paraphrased a verse from Romans in this way: *“I decide to do good, but I don’t really do it; I decide not to do bad, but then I do it anyway. My decisions, such as they are, don’t result in actions. Something has gone wrong deep within me and gets the better of me every time.”* [The Message]

Do you think this reflects your experience or not?

TEXTS: **Messing up and recovering**

These texts help us look at the ongoing challenges of living a godly life, when we are still on the mend, hanging onto habits and attitudes that cause us to disappoint God, ourselves and the people around us. In the midst of this reality of everyday Christian living, the scriptures give us hope of renewal and cleansing, of the possibility to move forward experiencing greater freedom.

Psalms 51

1 John 1:5-2:22

1 Corinthians 10:12-14

Discovery Questions

- What jumps out at you as we read through these passages?
- What statements encourage or challenge you?
- What questions do you have about what you have read? What does this passage teach us about God?
- What does this passage teach us about ourselves?
- If we believe this passage is from God, what will we do differently this week?

Wrapping Up

Meditation text

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Prayer

Session three: *Spiritual Discipline #5 – Learning to live generously*



Getting to Know One Another

- Are you more of a traveler or a home-body?
- Are you more of a penny-pincher or a big spender?

Theme introduction

“If you decide for God, living a life of God-worship, it follows that you don’t fuss about what’s on the table at mealtimes or whether the clothes in your closet are in fashion. There is far more to your life than the food you put in your stomach, more to your outer appearance than the clothes you hang on your body. Look at the birds, free and unfettered, not tied down to a job description, careless in the care of God. And you count far more to him than birds.” Matthew 6:25-26 [The Message]

How is the sentiment expressed here a direct contrast to the nature of our everyday economic lives?

TEXTS: **Money, Contentment and Generosity**

Jesus had more to say about the use of money, in the Gospels, than he did about heaven or hell. He talked about priorities and learning to live contentedly. He talked about generosity of spirit and the generous use of whatever financial resources are at our disposal. In these passages the Apostle Paul broadens this discussion.

Philippians 4:10-20

2 Corinthians 8:1-15

Discovery Questions

- What jumps out at you as we read through this passage?
- What statements encourage or challenge you?
- What questions do you have about what you have read?
- What does this passage teach us about God?
- What does this passage teach us about ourselves?
- If we believe this passage is from God, what will we do differently this week?

Wrapping Up

Meditation text

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Prayer

Session four: A Foundational Practice – Baptism



Getting to Know One Another

- What time do you usually wake up in the morning?
- Do you awaken naturally or need an alarm?
- Growing up, what was your favorite fairy tale or children's story?

Theme introduction

“The Holy Spirit uses symbols and ceremonies to nurture the relationship between humans and God. Christians remain malnourished when we have no place for festivals, drama, processions, banners, dance, colour, movement, instruments and incense. There are many notes on God's keyboard which we often neglect to sound, with the result that God's presence can be hard to access.” [Clark Pinnock]

How important to you are these kind of expressions? Like we find at sports events, graduations, special holidays...?

TEXTS: Repent and Be Baptized

In the Jewish tradition, baptism (immersion in water) was a symbolic way of indicating a desire to turn from past wrongdoing and be washed or cleansed for a fresh start. Jesus then told his followers that they should do the same thing as a public sign of their desire to walk with him and be incorporated into the family of God.

Matthew 28:18-20

Mark 1:1-8

Acts 2:36-41

Discovery Questions

- What jumps out at you as we read through these passages?
- What statements encourage or challenge you?
- What questions do you have about what you have read?
- What does this passage teach us about God?
- What does this passage teach us about ourselves?
- If we believe this passage is from God, what will we do differently this week?

Wrapping Up

Meditation text

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Prayer

Session five: A Foundational Practice – The Lord's Supper



Getting to Know One Another

- Tell a story to the group about one of the best dinner parties you have participated in.
- What makes an occasion like this “*memorable*”?

Theme introduction

Reflect on how a regular tradition in your life with family or friends, like Thanksgiving, Christmas or birthday celebrations, is meaningful to you. Share with the group why you think these kind of ‘remembering’ times are important to you – or not, as the case may be.

TEXTS: In Remembrance of Me

Jesus ate a last Passover meal with his followers on the night before he was crucified. This yearly Jewish meal of remembrance focuses on how God delivered the people of Israel from captivity in Egypt, and now, in Jesus’ death and resurrection, the same kind of deliverance was being made possible for all of humanity. Jesus asked his followers to continue this communal meal practice as a regular remembrance, and the Apostle Paul suggests that this is a way to “proclaim” the significance of Jesus’ death until he returns.

Luke 22:13-23

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Discovery Questions

- What jumps out at you as we read these passages?
- What statements encourage or challenge you?
- What questions do you have about what you have read?
- What does this passage teach us about God?
- What does this passage teach us about ourselves?
- If we believe this passage is from God, what will we do differently this week?

Wrapping Up

We have worked our way through two modules of this discussion series. We want to take a moment to reflect on where each of us might find ourselves on this journey toward wholeness in Jesus.

Take a couple minutes to read through the descriptions on the last page in this booklet. Where would you place yourself on this journey? Feel free to share with the rest of the group.

Meditation text

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Prayer

Jesus is the central relationship in my life – I'm a Jesus-centred disciple, with my life oriented around others

Jesus is the most important relationship in my life. It guides everything I do. I actively reorganize my priorities around Kingdom of God values and practices, which is all about restoring shalom in our community.

- What I need to help me grow*
1. Help in understanding the Bible better
 2. Help in developing relationship with Jesus
 3. Church leaders who model and reinforce how to grow spiritually
 4. Challenge to grow and take next steps
 5. Encouragement to take personal responsibility for spiritual growth

A close relationship with Jesus – I'm an active disciple; loving God and my neighbour

I feel really close to Jesus and depend on him daily for guidance. I know that I am deepening and maturing my understanding and relationship with him, including his heart of compassion for others.

- What I need to help me grow*
1. Help in understanding the Bible better
 2. Help in developing relationship with Jesus
 3. Church leaders who model and reinforce how to grow spiritually
 4. Challenge to grow and take next steps
 5. Encouragement to take personal responsibility for spiritual growth

Growing in relationship with Jesus – I'm a Jesus-follower

I believe in Jesus and what he has done for me. I am working on what it means to know him and to be an active disciple, including noticing the needs of others.

- What I need to help me grow*
1. Help developing relationship with Jesus
 2. Help in understanding the Bible better
 3. Church leaders who model and reinforce how to grow spiritually
 4. Compelling worship experiences
 5. Challenge to grow and take next steps

Exploring relationship with Jesus – I'm a seeker

I believe in God, but I'm not sure about where Jesus fits. My faith is just emerging, it's not really a significant part of my life. I'm pretty self-focused.

- What I need to help me grow*
1. Help developing relationship with Jesus
 2. Compelling worship experiences
 3. A feeling of belonging
 4. Help in understanding the Bible better
 5. Church leaders who model and reinforce how to grow spiritually

Journey toward wholeness in Jesus

(With insights from MOVE, by G Hawkins & C Parkinson, Zondervan 2011)