

Growing Together in Christ-

*This topic was addressed by Char Pelfrey, to the Monclova Women's Conference, 9
10 2011*

The theme chosen by the Monclova Women's Ministries this year is Growth. The theme verse is II Peter 3:18 "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." What a weighty topic they've chosen.

Romans 11: 33-36 tells us that we cannot even begin to comprehend the vastness of God. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!"

Growth . . . Everything that's alive grows. If it's not growing it's in the process of dying. Our human body is still growing. (And I'm not talking about our waist lines) Our stature may remain the same or even be shrinking but our cells are always working to rejuvenate, replenish and respond to our daily physical, mental and emotional needs. We are commanded by our Lord to grow spiritually . . . more of His ways, less of mine; Biblical communication skills; our perception of temporarily versus eternity; extending love, mercy and forgiveness to others as Christ loved us, etc. If we are not growing, we are stagnant decaying vegetation. We've become dull spiritual couch potatoes with an arrogance that we know what we need to live the Christian life, when in fact, we know very little of the depths of Christ's beauty, His plan for our life till our last breath.

Just about the time our self-centered nature convinces us that we've got the Christian walk down, the Lord is there to protect us from that delusion and remind us of our desperate need of Him. Sometimes even with humor.

("Cookie Thief" poem)

This first session is about Growing Together in Christ. You might be hearing the command from God for us to grow for the first time or you might have been a Christian now for many years. For many of us, much of what we've read in Scripture or heard from a Bible teacher we've heard before. It's about applying what we know, not stock piling facts.

Step One- Salvation (also called Justification) If you do not know Christ as your Savior, I implore with you that today might be the day you put your faith and trust in Him. We have no other hope. Romans 3:10 says “there is none righteous, no not one.” We have nothing to offer a holy, righteous all powerful God but our miserable sinfulness and that sinfulness will land us an eternity of separation from God and everlasting punishment in hell. God takes sin seriously! Romans 3:23 “For the wages of sin is death” Sins don’t scrub off. We can’t be obedient or good enough to seek entrance into heaven. Nothing but perfection will merit admittance and none of us qualify. What a horrible dilemma. Christ interceded for us, took the punishment we deserved on that cruel cross. He suffered for our sinfulness; He willingly paid the ultimate price for us so that His Father could look at us and see that our debt was paid. Romans 5:8 “But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Christ’s merciful provision for us is free but must be acted upon. Romans 10:9 says That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus Christ and believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” Prayers to God for salvation recorded in Scripture are quite diverse and usually quite brief. If you do not know the Lord, confess your guilt before Him now, give your heart and life to Him in obedience and trust Him to do the Work. If you have questions, please see the pastor’s wife, one of the church ministry staff, myself, Teri Mc Donald for support. Don’t wait for a better time.

Growth from salvation leads to...

Step Two- Sanctification through Disciplines of the Faith- Sanctification (not to be confused with Justification) is the life long continual process in which we are grow to be conformed to the image of Christ. Growth comes through self-examination, self-denial, watchfulness, Bible Study and memorization, prayer, etc. Our theme verse for today is a quote from the Apostle Peter to new Christians encouraging them to grow spiritually. Paul wrote to the Church at Rome in Romans 12:1-2 “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy acceptable unto God which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to his world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind” Sanctification is a progressive spiritual change in

one's person that begins at salvation and ends when we are glorified upon death and entrance into the presence of Christ. In our obedience to His directives though we must realize that our initiatives are nothing without God. Paul reminds the Philippians' in 2:13 "that it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure."

Growth in the process of Sanctification leads to . . .

Step Three- Service, as a Soldier Before we begin this final section, I want to make a note as we discuss service, that I do not want to minimize the importance of service to the Lord through loving and nurturing our families with quality time and ministering to those within our congregation. We just don't have enough time to even begin those topics. For this session we'll briefly talk about our service as a soldier. Ephesians 6:10 – 18 compares our service to the Lord with that of a soldier in active combat. We are asked to wear body armor, a girdle (not the kind some of you are wearing), helmet; take a shield and a sword. To be ready for really rough combat. Sounds pretty intense, doesn't it? What should you expect when you offer your life to Christ to be used in His service? Expect God to be true to His Word and use you. Expect the unexpected! He left us here for worship and service and we have 6000 years of case study observing how creatively He can take the impossible and make it possible, bringing glory to Himself, often using the most unlikely soldier. Guiding a man to build a sea worthy floating barge full of irritated animals, crippling the mighty Egypt with plagues with the words from stuttering Moses then parting the Red Sea with his staff, David popped off Goliath, Joseph from slave to Vice Pharaoh, lots of miracles at the hands of untrained disciples, really big things to name just a few. Has God changed? Is He still not seeking obedient followers to submit to His plan and take His Gospel to the world?

My husband and I, along with our church, began to realize quite a few years ago that the people in our town of Mason needed the Gospel and we couldn't just sit back and wait for them to walk through our doors. We started taking the Gospel to them by letting our lights shine. We got involved in our community, we enter the local parades, we're on boards and community committees, coach ball, have

City wide holiday events, sponsor local charities, feed the fire department once a month, hand out free hot dogs on our ball fields, get out among the people with Christ's offer of hope. Some times we work collectively as a church, but most of the time it is our individual lives intermingled with our community, our co workers, our neighbors that expose our love for the Lord. It took years for the city to acknowledge, understand and trust that in humility we love and serve each other as we love and serve our Lord.

I cannot tell you where, how or when God will mingle you with the world but it is His plan. He will, if you are obedient. None of us are exempt from the Great Commissions call to go. Being salt and light doesn't mean waiting for sinners to walk through the doors of the church!

As good soldiers we need to be prepared for our quest, understand our enemy, be able to stay balanced, flexible and on task, able to laugh at our mistakes and minimize the mistakes of others, committed to obey orders even if they become difficult or don't make sense.

Expect people to fail you, misunderstand you, hurt and disappoint you, stab you in the back, and lie about you, outside and even inside the church. Our beautiful, perfect Savior was treated that way by friend and foe, are we better than He? Will Satan sit idly by and watch his stronghold challenged? Christ's light shines the brightest through us to the lost world when we suffer with a Biblical, Christ-like response.

We serve Christ not out of duty but because He is worthy of all honor, praise, and worship. We love Him because He first loved us. He is precious, beautiful, faithful and merciful. His attributes are limitless!

Growing together . . . from salvation, through the sanctification process to service. Let's recommit ourselves to Him together now as we pray.

