

Grow to be Like Jesus
Part 2 of Vision Casting Series

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TCUMC – 8:00, 9:15 and 10:30am

I. Intro to series

Good morning! My name is Matt Reynolds and I am the Director of Discipleship here on staff. This morning we are continuing a very important three part sermon series. This is not just a normal sermon series, instead over these three weeks we are really digging into the core of who we are as a church.

At Tipp City UMC we believe God has called us, as he has every church, to participate in the Great Commission. When Jesus left his final instructions before leaving earth he said, “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you and I will be with you to the very end of the age.” As Christians there is no escaping this mandate. These are the marching orders for all who choose to follow Christ.

As a church we have paraphrased this command of Jesus by saying our purpose is to “reach people far from God and develop radiant followers of Christ.” That is the very essence of our DNA as a church. Everything we

do has to be about this purpose. In fact, the moment we stop pursuing this goal we indeed stop being a Christian church. Any group of people can get together for fun activities, but only a group of people committed to Christ's mandate to make disciples could accurately be called a church. Tipp City United Methodist Church exists to reach people far from God and develop radiant followers of Christ. Period.

In order to help us accomplish that purpose our church has identified three key steps along our Christian journey. These three steps are simply the process by which we can accomplish our purpose. In order to reach people far from God and develop radiant followers of Christ we believe, as individuals and as a church, we must do three key things. 1. Love God and Others 2. Grow to be like Jesus 3. Serve the world. These three things are the core of what we do as body of Christians. In the months to come you will be hearing these three phrases over and over. Why? Because by loving God and Others, Growing to be like Jesus, and Serving the World we will be able to fulfill our purpose. By concentrating all of our energy on those key steps we will be able to be the church God has called us to be and the church Jesus commanded us to be in the Great Commission.

To put it simply one more time, our purpose as a church is to reach people far from God and develop radiant followers of Christ. How are we

going to do that? We have a three step action plan, LOVE, GROW, SERVE.

Together our purpose and journey explain fundamentally everything you need to know about our church family. That is what we are all about. No other agendas, no other tricks...we live and die by this purpose and journey.

II. Intro to Grow

Last week Pastor Chris started by sharing about our purpose and then Pastor Bonita spoke about what it means to love God and others. Today I want to spend a few minutes talking about the second step in our journey, Grow to be like Jesus.

You know, we use phrases like this a lot in churches. We talk about wanting to “grow spiritually.” Or maybe you have heard someone say something like, “I really feel like I have grown in my relationship with God.” Maybe someone has heard phrases like, “It is important that we are growing in our walk with the Lord.” What does all this mean? What is the deal with all this talk about spiritual growth? Most people in churches have some idea that there is supposed to be change or growth in their lives. We

all recognize that somehow there is something that is supposed to happen in our lives, but what? What kind of growth? And how?

III. What does it mean to grow spiritually?

The bible encourages growth throughout the New Testament. In Colossians 1:10, Paul shares his hopes for that church. He says, “And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God.”

2 Peter 3:18 exhorts, “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

Ephesians 4:15 says, “Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.”

1 Peter 2:2 says, “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.”

So what is this all about, what kind of growth is a Christian supposed to experience?

The bottom line is this...growth is simply all about becoming more and more like Jesus. Growth means learning to live like Jesus would live if

he were you. Growth means literally becoming more Christ-like in every part of your life.

When Jesus called people to follow him they literally followed him and learned how to be like him. Jesus didn't ask the disciples to stop fishing for a minute and repeat a prayer after me and then go back to your normal life. NO. Jesus insisted that those who were going to choose Jesus really chose him. They had to leave everything and follow him. They committed their whole lives to being shaped by his influence.

If we are going to be radiant followers of Christ, it means we have to grow to be like him. We have to commit ourselves to following him so closely that we watch his every move and we learn to live like Jesus.

IV. Why grow?

Why should we do this? Why does it matter if we grow to be like Jesus? I mean if I have placed my salvation in Christ and he has promised me eternity in heaven isn't that enough?

Do you know that Jesus never asked one person in the Bible to "ask for him to come into their heart?" Do you know he never even asked anyone to pray to receive him?

No, Jesus called people to repent, turn away from their sinful lives, and follow him. He even said, “If anyone would come after me he must deny himself, pick up his cross daily, and follow me.” Nothing cute and easy about that. For Jesus, being his follower absolutely meant life change, it meant growth and sacrifice.

God wants us to grow to be like Jesus so that we can honor him with our whole lives. When we leave our sinful ways and live for God it reflects his glory here on earth. 1 Peter 2:12 says, “Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.” In order to live that kind of life it takes growth. And when we grow to living lives that reflect Christ we also point others to God.

God wants us to grow to be like Jesus so we can honor him and reflect him in the world, but that’s not the only reason.

You see, not only does God desire for us to live lives that reflect him more and more so that we can bring him honor. But also he is ultimately loving and wants the absolute best life for us. God knows that we will be most happy when we live more like Jesus. So by insisting our continual growth to be like Jesus, God has his and our best interest in mind.

V. How do we grow?

So we grow spiritually when we learn to live more like Jesus. We do this so we can honor God and because it is the best life we could live. But how? How does this really happen? It sounds great in theory. We all have that feeling like we ought to grow or change or something. But how?

Well here is the reality of the situation. We can't grow ourselves. We can't become like Jesus ourselves. The simple fact is that only God can change us in that way. Only God can make us shaped into the image of Christ. It is only by his grace that we can ever grow at all.

1 Corinthians 3 is talking about spiritual growth and it says, "neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow."

So that's it right. We just sit around and wait for God to change us and we don't have to worry about anything since it is only by God's grace that we grow.

Well not quite.

I want to think about this plant for a minute.

If you wanted to grow a plant of some sort what sort of things would you need to do?

Well you would need to get some kind of container and some soil. You would need some tools and of course water. To make anything grow you have to have the right amount of sunlight. You might want some fertilizer or plant food or something. Basically there are certain things you have to do to make the environment right for growth.

Now say you get everything just right and do everything you know how to do to make this plant grow healthy and strong. Are you guaranteed that this plant will grow? NO. There is no way to guarantee that. Only God makes things grow. If you have ever tried to grow something I'll bet you have had a time when you thought you did everything right, but still somehow it just didn't grow like you expected.

Here is the point. Our job is to use whatever tools we can to make our lives fertile for growth so that God can do the miraculous transforming work inside of us that only he can do. We can't change ourselves. We can't grow to be like Jesus on our own. But we can make ourselves ripe for growth and so that we are open to what God wants to do in us.

The main way we create the right environment for growth is through spiritual disciplines. These are simply practices that help put us in the right place so that God can change us. Some of these tools that we can use for growth include worship, prayer, fasting, solitude, silence, confession,

Christian friendships, bible study, self examination, meditation and on and on. The key for us then is to figure out which tools best help us as individuals to prepare the soil of our lives for God's growth within us.

So it is not all just up to God. Only God can truly make us grow, but we still play a role in preparing our hearts.

Dallas Willard says, "Grace is opposed to earning, not effort." What he means is that we cannot earn God's favor through good works, but that doesn't mean we invest all we've got and work hard to grow to be like Jesus.

Let me share one more example about how we grow to be like Jesus.

You know there is a big game today right?

Well here is a jersey that belongs to my wife. She has a little crush on Peyton Manning. Many are already saying he might be the best quarterback of all time. Now let's imagine that I really looked up to him and wanted to be an NFL quarterback just like him.

So what I decide to do is put on a jersey just like him and I get my cleats out and I go play football and I try my absolute hardest to be just like him. How successful will I be? I would be terrible!

No matter how hard I try I am not ever going to be like Peyton Manning by giving my best effort. Now suppose at the age of 5 I decided the same thing and then I spent the rest of my life training and investing

hundreds of hours of practice and film study and weight training. I might not be as good as him, but I might be closer than I would if I just went out on a field today and tried my best.

So many Christians today get frustrated because their approach to spiritual growth is to just try harder. Simply trying harder is not the way to spiritual growth or growth in almost any area of life. Just like other things in life, the life with God takes training. We have to retrain ourselves over time to live different lives. We do this by using the tools of spiritual growth to make us ripe for growth and being open to God's work in our lives.

VI. What is the result?

So what's the result? How do we know we are getting anywhere? It's pretty simple. We live more like Jesus. How did Jesus live...he loved God and others and served the world. You see it all comes back full circle. The more we love God and others we grow to be like Jesus. And the more we grow we learn to love God and others even more and serve the world even more.

Let me quickly remind you of what the gauge is not. Growth does not mean that you do bible study more often...though that could be a side effect. It does not mean that you are more frequent at church...although that also

could be a side effect. You see, none of that stuff really matters unless you are becoming more like Jesus in the way you really live. Unless you are treating people with more love, what does it matter that you happen to be more strict with your bible reading. We can't make the mistake of mistaking the tools for the results. Bible study, personal devotion time, prayer, church attendance...those are tools that help with spiritual growth. But the result we are after is a life that resembles Jesus.

Last week Pastor Bonita shared that wonderful scripture from 1 Corinthians 13. The beginning of that chapter says, "If I speak in the tongues^[a] of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ²If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames,^[b] but have not love, I gain nothing."

VII. So now what...

So what now? How do we get started? As a church we have identified this idea as one of our main steps on the journey towards fulfilling our purpose. What can we do here at Tipp City UMC in order to be intentional about growing to be like Jesus?

Well the primary tools we have established to help us in this part of the journey are core classes and growth groups.

These two opportunities are ways to churn up the soil of your heart and prepare it for the ways God needs to work.

We have just started a new semester and maybe you didn't take the chance to get signed up. Well this morning you could take that step towards growth by still signing up for a group.

Or maybe this morning you need to ask yourself what you need to do to help prepare the soil of your life for growth. Have you been trying hard, but not training?

Think of something that has helped you grow in the past. How could you add that to your life routine to help you grow?

God has called us to an incredible life where we don't have to settle for staying the same. We have the opportunity to honor him and live our best life possible by creating a ripe environment for growth and then allowing him to transform us to be like Jesus.

This morning will you settle for the staleness of where you are right now? Or will you let God do his incredible work and continue to shape you into the person he has created you to be? Together let's commit to grow to be like Jesus. Let's pray.