

Growth in not optional

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Let's pray.

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Last week we looked at baptism in water and for those of you who couldn't make it can I encourage you to take some time to listen to the message or read it at our website.

If after listening or reading the message on the website and you are ready to be baptised then please let me know and we will organise a time and place for this to happen.

Also last week I asked us the question, what is our mission in life as individuals and together, and we looked at the mission that Jesus left us - was to make disciples of ALL nations, baptising them and teaching them.

I also said that every single believer is a disciple and will always be a disciple. A disciple is simply one who learns and continues to learn - someone who grows both in knowledge and experience.

In this life we never arrive - we are always learning, always heading toward our destination.

This destination has been provided for by God and is summed up in Romans 8. Let's turn there and take a closer look.

Romans 8:28-29

28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

29 For those whom he foreknew he also **predestined** to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

From this passage we see that our destiny is to be conformed to the image of his Son.

God does have a wonderful plan for us and that plan is that we grow in our knowledge and experience of Jesus - to be shaped and moulded by the Father so that we are just like Jesus.

What does it mean for God to predestine?

Dictionary.com says that to predestine is to destine in advance to foreordain or to predetermine.

It simply means that God has already determined that we who are called by him and love him will be conformed to be just like Jesus.

This is our destination, our journey. We will be like Jesus in word and deed and God will ensure that this takes place in our lives.

Philippians 1:6

6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 2:13

13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

From these passages and also from many other parts of the Bible we see God sovereignly at work in our lives and in all of history, but we also see that we are also responsible to work as well.

1 Peter 2:2

2 Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation--

2 Peter 3:18

18 But **grow** in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

It's not all God and it's not all us - it's him and us. Our task is to cooperate with God and not resist the work he is doing in our lives.

For the Christian growth is not optional.

So, how does this growth take place in our lives?

I believe that it is take place in both knowledge and action.

In Romans 12:2 it says

Romans 12:2

2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

The Greek word for this renewal simply means to renovate in such a way that it makes a person different from what they were in the past. A backyard blitz of the mind if you like.

We have all seen the renovation shows on television, like The Block, Backyard Blitz, 10 Years Younger in 10 Days and The Biggest Loser.

If you're like me, that thing that I never want to miss in these shows is the before and after images.

I can miss some of the process of change, but if I only get to see one thing then it has to be the before and after photos. And some of the transformations are pretty amazing.

This is the sort of transformation God has in store for each of us.

The theological term for this transformation is sanctification.

Sanctification in the Bible carries two phases or time periods of meaning. It means first to make holy, and secondly to continue to make holy - a positional holiness and a conditional holiness.

2 Thessalonians 2:13

13 But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits to be saved, **through** sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.

Here God chooses and separates us for himself by a positional holiness **through** the act of regeneration or salvation.

Our position toward him was once alienated, orphaned and hostile and because of his great mercy he has saved us and set us apart for himself through sanctification by the spirit.

He has brought us near to himself, adopted us into his family and removed the hostility that once existed between us and him.

There is also the ongoing work of holiness or sanctification in our lives.

1 Thessalonians 5:23

23 Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Colossians 3:10-12

10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

11 Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

12 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,

This ongoing sanctification takes place by renewal of our minds through his truth - God's word.

John 17:17

17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

So, we are to grow in God's grace through knowledge of God from his word, but we are also to grow in Jesus through actions. James says that faith without works is dead.

I want to focus on a particular type of action this morning in regard to how we grow in Jesus.

This action or actions are normally beyond our level of current experience and sometimes beyond our understanding. These are the type of actions that require faith.

If you can remember the story of Jesus walking on the water at night and the disciples were in the boat when they saw what they thought was a ghost which was in fact Jesus.

Peter then calls out to Jesus and says if it is you; command me to come to you on the water and Jesus says to Peter come.

We know from the story that Peter actually walked on water and was coming closer to Jesus and saw the wind he began to sink.

You could say that as soon as he took his eyes off Jesus and put them on his circumstances he began to sink. Fortunately for Peter he called out to Jesus and he saved him, but Jesus did correct him by saying you of little faith.

Do you know we can choose to be like Peter and get out of the boat and walk on the water or be like the other disciples who stayed in the comfort of the boat?

They neither failed nor succeeded. They stayed dry and they also stayed relatively comfortable.

One thing we find with Peter during his life is that even though he failed on this occasion and was to fail on further occasions - he never gave up and learned how to live a life of faith based actions.

If we are to grow in Jesus we also need to be prepared to follow Jesus when he calls us to take faith based actions.

This type of action - when we don't know if we will succeed or fail really puts a rocket under our growth in God.

Why are we sometimes reluctant to get out of the boat when Jesus calls us?

I believe the ultimate reason has to be doubt that we will succeed or that God will come through for us - essentially a fear of failure.

Not one of us is immune from the crippling fear of failure. But will be back off from what God calls us to do?

We can just skim through life without ever having the need to exercise faith, but we will also never grow in God's provision if we aren't prepared to take a risk in him.

Now, I don't mean that you take risk for risk sake but when God is calling you to do something that is beyond your capabilities or skill level or faith level, are you prepared to get out of the boat of self comfort and see Jesus come through?

This will mean different things for each of us. What is it that God is currently calling you to do that is beyond your present capabilities, desires or faith level?

I believe that with growth comes capacity, capacity to take on more, to believe for more and to ultimately be more effective for him.

What I have found that as you follow Jesus' call in different areas of life that are beyond your present capabilities, desires or faith level, is this.

You pray heaps because you know that you can't do it on your own. And when he comes through you look back and say wow that wasn't as bad as I thought it was going to be.

You start to believe that you can follow him wherever he calls you as even if you fail, he uses it to teach you and if you succeed he builds capacity in you to believe for more.

What is it that Jesus is calling you to do at present?

- Is it a work assignment that you have never done before?
- Is it looking for work for the very first time in your life?
- Is it ministry opportunities that may stretch you beyond what you have done before?
- Is it talking about your faith to family, friends or work colleagues?

- Is it praying for someone who needs healing but is not a believer?
- Is it talking with someone in church who you have never spoken to before?

Whatever it is don't be afraid of failure, put your hope in God and give it everything you've got.

To recap; God is at work in us and we are to grow in his grace.

We are to renovate our minds through his word and we are to be courageous in faith based actions that Jesus calls us to do.

We don't take risk for the sake of risk. We are only to take risks that Jesus calls us to take.

And finally growth is not optional for believers it is what God has destined for us that in all things we are to be conformed to the image of Jesus.

Let's pray.