



2024 LifeConnect Group Material

About Grow

This year, we will embark on a journey of robust spiritual growth as Christians. It's not about growth for growth's own sake; rather, the emphasis lies on cultivating good, godly growth. While growth is an inherent aspect of life, achieving a healthy and intentional progression is crucial. Just as a balanced diet, exercise, and proper nutrition contribute to human growth and longevity, and plants require water, sunlight, and pruning for optimal development, as Christians, we must discern the specific areas in which we need to grow to truly reflect Christ in our lives.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Apostle Peter conveyed an imperative to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18a). These final recorded words of Peter were uttered in context of anticipation of the Lord's future coming. It's crucial to recognise that our faithfulness, triumphs, and faith in Christ are solely brought to pass by His grace. This grace will endure as we consistently remain connected to Christ, akin to grapes abiding in the vine. Our effectiveness is contingent upon our unity with Him, allowing His grace to flow through us as we abide in Him.

In addition to grace, we must also grow in the knowledge of our Lord. Growing in the knowledge of God means a personal divine revelation of who God is beyond your intuitions and perceptions about Him. All things were created through Him and for Him (Colossians 1:16b). For in Him we live, and move, and have our being (Acts 17:28). Everyone will give an account to Him and He will be the judge of both the living and the dead (1 Peter 4:5); He is sovereign. As we gain this knowledge, it weaves itself into a tapestry of faith, and Christian theology begins to make sense. With great conviction you can declare, "Jesus, you are my Lord and my God."

As we lead our respective LifeConnect groups, let's remember whom Apostle Paul attributed as our source of growth: "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow" (1 Corinthians 3:6-7). It is God who causes us to grow.

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Guidelines:

This guide contains six subjects in line with our theme - “Grow” - to aid LifeConnect group leaders in steering their group discussions. Its purpose is to foster meaningful dialogue, alleviating the challenges of preparing topics. Read it through prayerfully. Infuse your unique perspective while adhering to the teachings of God's Word.

Some topics can be conducted in more than one session; feel free to divide them as needed. Deliberately navigate through each subject, ensuring the group comprehends it thoroughly before moving forward.

Avoid conducting LifeConnect groups like a traditional Bible study, where only one person dominates the entire session. The LifeConnect environment is crafted to foster mutual learning. Skillfully redirect the conversation to the topic if it strays. Pose questions, listen attentively, and discern the Spirit's guidance as you navigate the discussion.

Remember, God's grace is more than enough for you.

Good Growth

"¹ Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; ² but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. ³ He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers."

Psalm 1:1-3

Ice Breaker

Ask the group about the necessary conditions for optimal growth of a tree or a plant. Encourage them to explain their responses.

(Feel free to replace this with your own ice breaker activity.)

Introduction

Like a tree, our growth is influenced by location and positioning. In the example of Psalm 1, optimal growth for a tree occurs when it is planted by streams of water. In the metaphorical sense, water often symbolises the Word of God in the Bible. By delighting in and meditating on His word, you become 'rooted' in it. This connection then permeates your conduct, choices, and emotions.

Hence, a growing Christian is a practicing Christian. As A. W. Tozer said, we are created in his image that we may act like God. Not in a boastful way but in humility and holiness as Christ exemplified. As Christ is the incarnation of God, we should be the incarnation of Christ. We cannot do so in a flawless manner in this life, but we can in an aspirational and continuing manner.

So, how can one attain spiritual growth? Like a tree flourishing beside streams of water, regular immersion in His word is essential. Just as the Spirit of God hovered over the waters in Genesis 1:2, one must be immersed in the Spirit-inspired Word to be filled by his Spirit —a principle of like begetting like.

The Outcome of Good Spiritual Growth

1. **Yields its fruit in its season.** You will grasp the significance of seasons, recognising that not every phase of your life is a peak, yet understanding that each life season is indispensable for yielding fruit at the right time. There is deep resolve undergirded by patience, trust and understanding of God's divine nature.
2. **His leaf does not wither.** Leaves have more than aesthetic appeal. They protect the tree from extreme wind, rain, and sunshine. They facilitate photosynthesis that converts sunlight, carbon dioxide and water into glucose (sugar) providing energy essential to the tree's growth. When a Christian is immersed in His word, they will discover the vitality to face life's challenges and be a blessing to others.
3. **Everything he does prospers.** A maturing Christian experiences a thriving spiritual life grounded in a deepening connection with God. As one aligns with God's word, the inclination toward righteous living emerges, leading to the enjoyment of God's favour and guidance.

Psalm 1:1 provides practical insight into how we can overcome the temptations of sin by finding delight in His word. It emphasises the postures of walking, standing, and sitting in the company of evil influencers. These postures symbolise how sin tempts us – first by getting our attention (walking); then gaining our interest (standing); and ultimately enticing us to engage (sitting).

On the contrary, when our focus is on growth and a genuine delight in God's word, we will be less inclined to entertain such temptations. Our hearts will be on high alert to live according to His word, preventing the allure of sin from taking hold.

Group Discussion

Read and Discuss Matthew 12:33 (Make a tree good and its fruit will be good or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognised by its fruit.)

Apply this analogy to define "goodness" among people, also remembering the teaching of Psalm 1:1-3.

Grow & Flourish

“The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.”

Psalm 92:12

Ice Breaker

Ask the group about their observations regarding the natural world that convey insights into the nature of God.

Introduction

God manifests Himself through two significant avenues: specific revelation and general revelation. Specific revelation pertains to God unveiling Himself and His thoughts through sacred scriptures – the Bible. On the other hand, general revelation encompasses the reality that God gives evidence of His existence and discloses certain aspects of Himself through the wonders of His creation.

We are made righteous by God in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21). The above passage (Psalm 92:12) offers us an analogy of how righteous people will flourish and grow – like a Palm tree and the Cedars of Lebanon. While both trees demonstrate resilience and adaptability in their challenging environments, they possess distinctive characteristics that set them apart. What are these unique attributes that make them stand out?

1. Palm Tree

- a. Flexibility – Palm trees gracefully sway with powerful winds or storms. Their resilience is in their suppleness. Rather than resisting the wind, they yield and bend in the direction it guides them. Similarly, Christians exhibit adaptability to the varying seasons in their lives embracing new beginnings and necessary endings. Instead of trying to force God to conform to our wills, we allow circumstances to become a means through which God can shape us.
- b. Fruit bearing – They produce fruits amidst harsh environments. Similarly, Christians thrive and exhibit Christ-like character even in challenging circumstances. Psalm 92:14 testifies that even in old age they shall bear; they shall be fresh and flourishing.
- c. Robust root system – Despite their slender appearance they have a strong and deep root system which provides stability and support. In like manner, we ought to be firmly grounded in the understanding of the God we worship – the Alpha and Omega, the creator of all things, and the source of life.

2. Cedars of Lebanon

- a. Majestic Stature - The Cedars of Lebanon are renowned for their impressive height and massive trunks, representing both stability and wisdom. Likewise, as we grow in Christ, we become a model of stability. Others will take notice of our unwavering determination, and unintentionally, we become a source of encouragement to them through our wise and godly counsel.
- b. Full of sap and green – The Cedars of Lebanon boast evergreen foliage providing protection, energy, and timeless appearance. As we experience growth like the Cedars

of Lebanon, we will find fulfilment in each phase of life. This becomes a personal testimony, a narrative of God's goodness, meant to be shared for His glory.

- c. Longevity – The Cedars of Lebanon can live for several centuries; a picture of endurance and strength. Similarly, we will have an endurance born through the testing of our faith. You become strong not because you live a storm-free life, but you experience a storm proof life as you look to the “sun of righteousness” for vigour and energy.

It's no surprise that God chose these trees to illustrate the characteristics and outcomes of a believer who chooses to grow and thrive in his relationship with God.

Group Discussion:

1. If you are aiming to grow in the Lord, what traits and outcomes do you hope to observe in your life?
2. What personal choices should you make to foster spiritual growth in the Lord?

Grow Up

"Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans?"

1 Corinthians 3:1-3

"Therefore, let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God."

Hebrews 6:1

Ice Breaker:

Display the image (or provide a description for) the 3 Stooges and (or) Dumb & Dumber. Ask the group what they like about them? (E.g., their use of slapstick and screwball comedy styles).

Despite those things people like, do they want to be like them?

It is unlikely that anyone with a sound mind would aspire to emulate such characters. Comedic gags and absurdity may be amusing for a while, but not for long. Even parents would not want their kids to remain dependent for the rest of their lives. Adorable as they are, the desire is for them to mature and grow up.

Introduction:

The Corinthian church is a notable example of believers who required spiritual maturity. Evidenced by divisions and inappropriate conduct within the church, their immaturity prompted Apostle Paul to give admonishment and challenge them to grow up spiritually and change their ways.

Their situation is not far different from the attitudes and manners of some professing Christians today. Hypocrisy, legalism, materialism, lack of empathy, and lukewarmness are some of the general observations and criticisms directed towards Christians.

Growing up spiritually is imperative. In which areas we need to grow spiritually?

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

2 Peter 3:18

1. We need to grow in His grace. Out of His kindness and goodwill, grace is the unmerited and undeserved favour of God to us. We need more of His grace to reflect Christ in us. Christlikeness is attained only through abiding, remaining, and following. Apart from Christ we can't do anything. For in Him we live, and move, and have our being (Acts 17:28).
2. We need to grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He has revealed Him. God has shown what God is like. This is not just an intellectual knowledge about the person but a relational knowledge of the person – The one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known (John 1:18). Like the disciples' query in Matthew 8:27, "Who is this Man?" We too should seek a personal revelation that brings satisfying understanding.

As A. W. Tozer reminded us, “true Christians are practicing Christians. True faith commits us to obedience. True religion leads to moral action.” As Christ is the incarnation of God, we should be the incarnations of Christ. Not in the perfect, as we can never be fully like Him, but in an aspirational and progressive sense. We must grow up in this manner.

Group Discussion

1. Upon self-reflection, in which aspect (grace or knowledge) do you recognise the need for personal growth and maturity in Christ?
2. What is your personal takeaway about the need to grow in His grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?

Grow by Renewing Your Mind

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may approve what the will of God is, that which is good and pleasing and perfect.” (Romans 12:2)

Ice Breaker:

Ask the group to recall things they believed in childhood that they now know are not true. Discuss the ways that these changes in belief from falsehood to truth caused the person to ‘grow up’.

Introduction

In our previous sessions we have learned of the importance of growing. Not just growing for the sake of growing but growing well. We must always remember that it is possible to grow wrongly, to progress in the wrong direction instead of the right one. It is possible to grow but never flourish; to grow but never ‘grow up’. Our growth must be from immaturity to maturity, away from evil and towards righteousness, growing in godliness and slowly becoming more and more like Jesus Christ. Let’s begin to look at the practical foundations of growth in the Christian life.

In his letter to the church in Rome, Apostle Paul - under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit - recorded an absolute essential principle of growth in godliness. He instructed believers that they must “be transformed by the renewing of (their) minds”. In the context of this passage, Paul’s use of the word “transform” is akin to the idea of “growth”. He is exhorting the believers at Rome to be transformed (grow) from worldliness and corrupt living toward godliness and righteousness. What was the method he gave for achieving this growth? Renewal of mind.

We have already touched on this essential principle of renewing our minds in previous sessions. We have discussed the importance of being immersed in God’s Word. His Word is our source of truth and the basis for our thinking.

Similarly, we have noted Apostle Peter’s instruction to grow in knowledge of our Lord and Saviour. As human beings, our lives are a constant learning experience. We are born with almost no knowledge of anything, and as we journey through life, we gain knowledge and develop our thinking, understanding and beliefs. Similarly, when we come to Christ, a “second birth” of sorts, we may know little of God, His will, and true goodness beyond the very essentials of the gospel. Even Jesus Christ, the eternal God in human flesh, grew in His human nature “in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men”. (Luke 2:52) Growing in knowledge - knowledge of the right things - is core component of renewing our minds.

If we hope to grow by renewing our minds, or as Paul put it, “be transformed”, we must establish some necessary foundations.

Necessary Foundations:

1. A settled belief that God has spoken (through his Word). Most of what we know, we have been taught. Even if we have not experienced certain things first-hand, we know them because we trust the authority of a credible source. We know the date of our birth because our parents told us, and we trust their authority. We know things about countries we have never visited because we learned them from a teacher, a book, or a video someone showed us. We trust those things

as an authority on the matter. Even when we learn things by first-hand experience, we are trusting the authority of our own vision, hearing, smell, taste, or touch as a reliable source of information about the way the world really is. Similarly, to know the truth about spiritual things and tell the difference between good and evil, we need a reliable authority to teach us. The only reliable authority on these things is God, the eternal creator. His Word - the Bible - is His perfect, unfailing instruction that He has given us to teach us. If we view His Word as anything less than this, we have no reliable source of truth left to learn from.

2. A true conviction of the gospel; faith and not just knowledge. Knowledge without faith cannot save us nor change us. We must beware; it is possible to know the truth and yet be indifferent to it. Indifference to the truth will never result in good growth. Jesus described people who learn the truth and receive it with joy but exchange it for their desire for other things. (Matt. 4:18-19) They retain knowledge, but never progress to faith because they have no root - no conviction. We must know the truth of the gospel, and we must also believe that it is the most important truth we could ever know as fallen men and women in need of salvation.
3. An honest intent to follow Christ. Renewing our minds - growth - will mean admitting many of our ideas about the world, including many things we believed were good, are wrong and exchanging those ideas for what God says (the truth). We must exchange our own preferences for His. We will only be able to do this if we make Him the highest priority of our life.
4. The assistance of the Holy Spirit, our "helper". Putting the first three foundations in place in our lives is only possible with the help of God the Holy Spirit. Without Him, we can never see the scriptures for what they truly are (His revealed Word), nor can we discern their meaning with real authority unless He illuminates them and guides us in our understanding. (1 Col 2:12-13). Both faith (true conviction), and repentance (an honest change of heart and intent to follow Him) are gifts that only He can give - we cannot produce them within ourselves. Thankfully, God promises to give the Spirit, and by extension all these gifts, to those who genuinely ask Him. (Luke 11:13)

Group Discussion

1. Upon self-reflection, are you lacking any of the foundations listed above that are required to grow by renewing your mind? Discuss how a lack of these things might be holding you back in your growth at the present time.
2. Lead the group in a prayer for all who are lacking a complete foundation, asking God to graciously give His Holy Spirit, faith, repentance, and a perfect trust in His Word to those who ask Him.

Grow in the Midst of the Battle

"I find then the principle that in me evil is present—in me who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in my members, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a captive to the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin." (Romans 7:21-25)

"Therefore I, the prisoner in the Lord, exhort you to walk worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, being diligent to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Eph. 4:1-3)

Ice Breaker:

Think of some well-known movies like Braveheart or Gladiator, and the heroes that define those stories.

Discuss the characteristics that make those characters heroic. Did they persevere in conflict, or did they give up? How did their character change throughout the progression of the story as they battled their enemies?

Introduction

The words of the Apostle Paul in Romans chapter 7 are striking; an honest self-assessment that leaves many readers at least a little confused in a modern world where the Christian life is often incorrectly idealised as a calm journey, certainly not as a war and a fight against a "body of death".

Yet, as we grow in our faith, we come to understand the words of Paul as we see them unfolding in our own lives. As our minds are renewed by immersion in the Word of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, more and more we come to see ourselves - our thoughts, behaviours, and desires - for what they really are in light of God's truth - tainted by evil even though we desire to do good.

The same man of God who exhorts us to "walk worthy of our calling" in Ephesians 4 paints for us an uncompromising picture of what the Christian life truly looks like: an all-out war against sin. Where before Christ delivered us, we were slaves, following a 'law of sin' without complaint, now we are free men and women, and engaged in a battle against what remains of our former selves.

1. Our battle is spiritual. *"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places."* (Eph. 6:12) The war we wage as Christians is not like the conflicts we're used to seeing in the news and in movies. Worldly wisdom and strategies are not sufficient for us to win these battles. Ephesians 6 details the 'armour of God' that we will rely upon to fight in this conflict.
2. Fought in the mind, lived out in the body. *"...in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth."* (Eph. 4:22-24) Our mind is the battlefield of this war. It is a struggle for truth in the midst of an onslaught of lies and deceit. We must fight

daily to think righteously, from which righteous living will begin to follow. As Apostle Paul exhorts us, *“Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”* (Col. 3:2-3)

3. Against a very real enemy. *“Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”* (1 Peter 5:8) Our enemy is real. He is ‘a liar and the father of lies’, who disguises himself as an ‘angel of light’. As believers we must be alert and wise to his schemes or we can easily fall victim to his deceit. Continue to study God’s Word and strengthen your knowledge of the truth and you will be better prepared to defend against lies and falsehood.
4. Life-long, but already ultimately won. In Romans 7 the Apostle Paul ponders, “Who will set me free from the body of this death?” He recognised that our battle against the corruption of our flesh - our old selves - will continue if we remain in this life. Yet, in the very next breath, he answers his own question with a shout of thanksgiving; “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”. God will ultimately set us free from all remnants of sin and corruption. At present we are being sanctified, but the sure hope of our faith is that we will be perfected; - glorified. Peter said it this way: *“But resist him (the devil), firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.”*

The more we grow in the right direction, the fiercer our battle will become. At the same time, the more we stand firm and resist the enemy, the more we will grow. This is the way of God’s world, and the magnificent way He has chosen to shape us gradually into the likeness of His Son. Throughout it all, we are never alone. “The LORD your God is the one who goes with you. He will not fail you or forsake you.” (Deut. 31:6) Fight the good fight of faith!

Group Discussion

1. How do you feel about the biblical assertion that the Christian life is a life of internal struggle and spiritual warfare?
2. Discuss some common ways that our renewed minds as believers can conflict with the desires and habits of our old selves. What tactics and strategies can we employ to help us win our daily battles and live consistently with the truth?
3. How does God’s promise to perfect (glorify) believers make you feel?

Grow in Boldness

“Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.” (Matt. 10: 32-33)

Ice Breaker:

As a group, think of some notable people from history who are remembered for their boldness (e.g. Martin Luther King Jr., Winston Churchill, Nelson Mandela). How would the world be different if they had stayed silent or compromised on their convictions?

Introduction

As we grow in godliness and begin to live more and more consistently with what our renewed minds know to be true, people will notice. Some will be intrigued and attracted to what they perceive we have gained, opening doors for discussions of spiritual things and sharing the message of the gospel of Christ. Others will fiercely oppose us as their sinful nature rebels against our God who is the source of all truth. Further, there will also be those who try and compel us to behave in ways inconsistent with our faith.

In any case, a renewed mind and consistent character will always bring us to encounters where we are forced to choose between boldly proclaiming Christ or shrinking back in fear. We may not be gifted as outspoken public evangelists in the same way that God has called some in the church to be, but as growing believers, gospel opportunities will find us even if we don't go looking for them.

On this matter, the Lord Jesus offers us both a stern warning and a blessed promise. He said, “Everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 10: 32-33). While even the best of us falter, including in this regard (even the Apostle Peter had to overcome this failure), the increasing trajectory of our lives over the course of time must be one of boldness; professing and standing for Christ against adversity and rejection, not of timidity, silence or denial.

If our life is a consistent pattern of denying Christ in front of others, we ought not expect Him to claim us before God when we stand for judgement in eternity. But if we confess Him, no matter how weak or unprepared we may feel in the moment, He has given us His unfailing promise that He will claim us as His own when the final day comes.

1. Don't be silent about what you have 'seen and heard'. “But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to hear you rather than God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.” (Acts 4:19-20) When we truly grasp the depth of the gospel of Jesus Christ, our entire perspective of the world changes. We see things in an eternal light, we see God at work, and we recognise the world's need for His life-giving words. We must not avoid speaking of what we have seen and the message we have heard, for it offers the only hope for those who are still lost.
2. ObeY God, rather than men. “And when they had brought them, they stood them before the Sanhedrin. And the high priest questioned them, saying, “We strictly commanded you not to

continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." But Peter and the apostles answered and said, "We must obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:27-29) When faced with choices to follow God's will or please others, our path is clear. It's not always easy, but we should always seek to obey God even if it requires us to disobey the demands of others or the laws of men.

3. Fear only God. *"Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." (Matt. 10:28) As we grow in our understanding of our great God, we will learn to hold a reverent fear of Him. Not because He is unjust or vindictive, but because He is all powerful and perfectly righteous (which we are not). When we know God this way, and we know we are on His side, we will begin to see with an eternal perspective and understand that we have no need to fear mere men.*

Group Discussion

As a group, discuss some of the thoughts and fears (the 'what if?'s) that might hold us back from boldly confessing Christ in front of others.