

Series: *Growing in Christ*
Message Title: Renewal and a Daily Devotional Life
Date: Sunday, March 5, 2017
Scripture: 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; Psalm 1
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Location: Warren Baptist Church, Augusta, GA

Introduction

Grow Up. We're making our way through a process of spiritual growth and maturity by identifying growth-indicators in our lives as professed followers of Christ.

G-R-O-W-I-N-G

Grace saves, sustains and serves.

G-R-O-W-I-N-G

Renewal. See Romans 12:2—shedding of the old view of life and embracing one that focuses on the will and glory of God. This is the activity of the Holy Spirit in us, but there is responsibility for us too. Notice the command: “be being transformed”. It is personalized based on your mind!

“Witness protection is protection of a threatened witness involved in the justice system, including defendants and other clients, before, during, and after a trial,

usually by police. While a witness may only require protection until the conclusion of a trial, some witnesses are provided with a new identity and may live out the rest of their lives under government protection.” (The Client)

New identity. New life in Christ!

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17 ESV).

2 Corinthians is a strange mix of problematic experiences (a life filled with good, bad and ugly) and a powerful cause for hope.

See 2 Corinthians 4:1, 8-11, 16-18.

The Apostle Paul talks about “losing heart” (running out of steam, throwing in the towel, dropping out of the race, quitting). Some people often experience many quitting points in life: marriage, dreams, goals. Some quitting points, though, are not bad things; some are the best.

Given the many ways in which we can lose heart and hope, the Apostle Paul speaks of and points to a daily renewal.

See 2 Corinthians 4:16. This renewal involves encouragement, perspective and enduring hope.

Last week we discussed *metamorphosis*. This week, *photosynthesis* is the process by which green plants and some other organisms use sunlight to synthesize foods from carbon dioxide and water. Photosynthesis in plants generally involves the green pigment, chlorophyll, and generates oxygen as a by-product.

Here the Apostle Paul speaks of an energy conversion that happens inside a believer—something that revives the heart and renews hope.

How does this renewal happen? Last week we discussed the work of the Holy Spirit, but today, I want to give you an application—the development of a daily devotional life with God.

There are two types of people in world—life without God (world) vs. life with God (church).

Life with God involves connection, communion and cooperation.



1. Consider This Picture of Personal and Perpetual Renewal

“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; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on His law he meditates day and night. 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 ESV).

“a thriving tree of life”

Here we have a picture of a tree that is thriving, but the goal is not to tell us what trees do, but how life is!

“Blessed is the man”—individual in application, yet strangely similar to Romans 12:2.

“a thriving tree of life”

- **Stability**—planted. This is the opposite of Psalm 1:4—no roots, into the wind.

- **Productivity**

This tree bears fruit even though this tree is like all trees—it goes through all the seasons in life, yet it is a tree that continues to be productive.

- **Vibrancy**—“leaf does not wither”

Nothing is more attractive than a healthy plant and nothing is more unbecoming than a plant that is severely neglected. (5-year old hibiscus at our house—it once had incredible blooms, but I have noticed it lacks water and care in recent days.)

There is attraction, beauty and glory in a tree that prospers just as there is in a life vibrant with the life of Christ.

To this end, the Apostle Paul discusses the glory of this new life in 2 Corinthians 4:6-7. There is illumination of glory in jars of clay. There is a photosynthesis through spiritual renewal that is transformational in the life of every believer.

2. Cultivate the Practices for Personal and Perpetual Renewal

“a thriving life”

“Renewal is not something that simply happens *to* us; it is something that happens *with* us.”

There are practices, disciplines, tests (Romans 12:2) and activities that move us toward greater health and renewal. We live in a driven, obsessive-compulsive age!

This is not a works-unto-salvation, but a working-out-of-salvation.

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure (Philippians 2:12-13 ESV).

“a thriving life”

• Spend Time Alone With God and Keep it Simple

We now live in a new realm of life—spirit world. There needs to be time, room and attention given in our relationship with God.

“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” (2 Peter 3:18 ESV).

You cannot and will not know God if you do not spend time with God!

Notice I said, “Alone.” Today, we are in worship. Worship is important, and it is also vital that we develop a life of devotion and discipline with Him.

I was 15 years old when I first became aware of this need and began this practice. I started a small *9:59 Plan*, a guide to effective communication with God. I began to seek the Lord personally and daily because life with God is a relationship, journey, and I am needy!

No one can do this for you. Too many people want a “spiritual fallout” of the life and relationship of others with God, but we each need time with God ourselves. Sometimes we can quickly get overwhelmed and defeated. Let me suggest you start small in cultivating your relationship with God—maybe in your commute to work instead of listening to the radio, talking on the phone, etc. Determine your “God-time”!

You have a soul and you were made to know God and commune with Him.

“Thou has made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds rest in Thee!”

—Augustine

“Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth! (Psalm 46:10 ESV).

“The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD” (Lamentations 3:25-26 ESV).

“But now even more the report about Him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear Him and to be healed of their infirmities. But He would withdraw to desolate places and pray” (Luke 5:15-16 ESV).

We find rest, renewal and resource in the Lord.

Confession: It is still my greatest challenge to remain fresh in the Lord. It could be easy to omit, overlook, deny, yet don't you expect me to walk with God more than anything else?

Some Christians may let this be a point of guilt in their lives. “God's blessing on my life is not contingent upon my spiritual performance.” I did not say time with God doesn't matter, but God is not holding a stop watch! Performance = confidence, presence vs. miss = demerits and difficulty! Grace!

• **Assimilate the Word of God Daily and Make it Practical**

See Psalm 1. The parallel here is made between a tree that thrives and a life that thrives or prospers! It is not incidental, but

of fundamental importance that this tree is “planted by streams of water”.

Water is vital for life and there is nothing more vital for spiritual life than the water of the Word of God!

See Ephesians 5:26.

See John 17:17—Christ and His bride.

Spiritual renewal requires assimilation of the Word of God into our lives.

“Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation” (1 Peter 2:2 ESV).

Read the Word—plan, program, personal. This is not a dip, but a discipline. (Warren App)

Listen to the Word—(Warren App)

Memorize the Word—“I have stored up Your Word in my heart that I might not sin against You” (Psalm 119:11).

Meditate on the Word—“Meditation is to the soul what digestion is to the body.”
Spiritual vibrancy and maturity are directly related to your relationship to the Word of God.

“Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ.” —Jerome

• **Breathe the Air of Prayer and Remember It is Vital**

I put prayer here because it is something often more effective after we have received, reflected and reviewed God’s Word. We first listen to God and then respond through prayer.

My college professor, Dr. Henderson, often said at the beginning of each class, “Let’s pause for a breath of prayer.”

Many need a breath. I often remind grooms prior to the wedding ceremony, “Just breathe!”

Be natural, not formal. God isn’t listening for “key words”; He is looking at genuine hearts.

Make a list. Divide needs by days

Use a journal. Write prayer requests for yourself and God, not others. Give focus and record marker moments.

Ask God for perspective. Our view is so limited—more than telling Him about our struggles, burdens and problems.

See 2 Corinthians 4:17-18.

• **Offer the Sacrifice of Praise and Be Joyful**

“For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. Through Him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge His name” (Hebrews 13:14-15 ESV).

Thank the Lord at the beginning of each new day. Sing to the Lord—“make a joyful noise”.

It is so important that we cultivate joy in our lives.

See 2 Corinthians 4:15—not a gripe list, but a cause for joy and hope. There are many tests,

trials and tumults in life that make following Christ hard, but you can let praise take you from *how life is* and focus on *who God is*.

“Full participation in the life of God’s Kingdom and in the vivid companionship of Christ comes to us only through appropriate exercise in the disciplines for life in the spirit. Those disciplines alone can become for average Christians ‘the conditions upon which the spiritual life is made indubitably real.’ It’s true. And if this point can be made as convincingly as its truth and its importance deserves, the practical effects will be stunning. There will be a life-giving revolution in our personal lives and in our world.”

—Dallas Willard

This is true and powerful spiritual renewal.