

Series: G-R-O-W-I-N-G in Christ
Message Title: **G**enerosity: A Distributing Church
Date: Sunday, June 25, 2017
Scripture: Acts 2:41-47
Speaker: David H. McKinley
Location: Warren Baptist Church, Augusta, GA

Introduction

Do you know the significance of January 22, 2017? On that Sunday I asked you to turn to Ephesians 4 and we identified together the focus for this year of ministry in our church: *Grow Up! Maturity. Membership. Member.*

“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace... Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to **grow up** in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ” (Ephesians 4:1-3, 15 ESV).

It is hard to believe, but we are now halfway through the year.

God’s plan, pattern and purpose for each of us is to GROW UP spiritually—His grace effective to this end.

“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” (Romans 8:29 ESV).

The grand, gracious, glorious work of God in each of our lives, individually and collectively, is toward growth into Christ-likeness. God had one perfect Son and through Him, God wanted to provide an abundant life of growth for many more.

For the past six months, we have shared a journey through the study of God’s Word, understanding key indicators of growth and development in life and faith together.

This study has not been a book study, but a series of Bible studies through crucial texts on subjects and matters of importance in spiritual growth and development—

G-R-O-W-I-N-G in Christ.

Grace

Renewal

Obedience

Witness

Injury

No!

Generosity

Through this study, have you grown? Are you growing?

It is easy to measure physical growth. You can measure it in sizes. (Shoe illustration). Yet, while spiritual growth cannot be measured by size or scale, it can be measured by shape. Are you in an attitude and action, bearing the spiritual image of Christ? To this end, we have been examining and identifying patterns of growth using biblical passages.

What is true of growing Christians is also true of growing churches. The first church was a high-growth, high-yield church.

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8 ESV).

The Spirit of God was sent into the world to gather and grow the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The result of gospel proclamation and spiritual activation is seen in this passage:

“So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:41-47 ESV).

• **Baptism of repentance**—no more me, all of Him

“And Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 2:38 ESV).

- **Added to the church**—3,000 souls! What a dynamic event and what a glorious harvest. But that was just the beginning. In Acts 2:42, we identify and observe the marks of an “ordinary” church!

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42 ESV).

This was a dynamic church, but not an irregular or unusual church. There is much effort today to have an emotional, experiential, and exceptional church. But here in Scripture, we see the norm. Here is my prayer: Let Warren be an ordinary church according to Scripture.

““Radical, epic, revolutionary, transformative, impactful, life-changing, extreme, awesome, emergent, alternative, innovative, on the edge, explosive breakthrough, whole new level... Whatever happened to ordinary?... Ordinary has to be one of the loneliest words in the evangelical church vocabulary. There is this constant call for more experiences that are highly emotional, radical, edgy,

relevant, trendy.’ Another writer says, ‘There seems to be a growing weariness with the cult of extraordinariness.’ There is beginning to emerge a longing in the lives of 20- and 30-year-olds for real church. They’re worn out on the extremes.” —Michael Horton

Ordinary is not average, nor is it mediocrity. Our God is an extraordinary God! But the activity of the ordinary church is to express the growing work of God’s grace through His Spirit in the lives of the local church community.

What are the ordinary activities and attitudes of the church? See Acts 2:41-47 again. They are teaching, gathering, praying, distributing (the opposite of hoarding is giving), serving, caring, rejoicing, worshiping and growing!

I have taught through the text of Acts 2 several times and identified core values for our Warren ministry. See warrenbaptist.org/corevalues

God’s plan and design involves biblical growth and discipleship through the church. Growth is both promoted and protected in and through God’s church.

One of the hallmarks of growth and development in this church is seen in Acts 2:45—distributing.

Generosity is a quality that reflects genuine, authentic spiritual growth and maturity.

What did this church give? How would you characterize it? Distribution meant...



They Gave of Their Things

Acts 2:44-45 (possessions)

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21 ESV).

“In a culture where the average American spends \$1.26 for every dollar earned and 70 percent of Americans are living paycheck to paycheck, the church must teach God’s way of handling money because Americans will naturally gravitate toward the world’s way.”

However, the cross changes us!

Look at the story of the Good Samaritan:

"Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, "Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back." Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?"' (Luke 10:30-36 ESV).

What's yours is mine and I'll take it (thief)

What's mine is mine and I'll keep it (religious)

What's mine is yours and I'll share it (neighbor)

Money. Food. Necessities. They all understood they were blessed to be a blessing.

“Greed isolates people, generosity brings them together—and God has commanded us to be generous.” —Josh McDowell

The most important question for you as a growing Christian is not what are you *getting* out of church, but what are you *giving* to the church?

Do you give? How do you give? When do you give?

So many of you do give and I am so very thankful for the sacrificial, generous, and regular gifts of people at Warren, but it is still far too few! I didn't say we give *too little*. God meets our needs. However, there are still *too few* who give.

“It's grounded in the doctrine of God, that God owns absolutely everything and I own absolutely nothing.” —Ronnie Floyd

“Ministry that costs nothing, accomplishes nothing.” —J.H. Jowett

They Gave of Themselves

Acts 2:44, 46 (together)

This was not isolated individualists, but a communal commitment. This was a life shared in time and togetherness.

I am referring to our time and talents—something that affects daily life. “Day by day”—a way of life!

“Sometimes, the best thing you can do for someone is to just be available to them. Time is life’s most precious commodity!”

We cannot express church or community to others. This is why we discuss life and time management. Many of us fail to make time available for not only our walk with Christ, but for fellowship and service for Christ.

They Gave of Their Testimony

Acts 2:47 (They not only had possessions, but they had possession of the gospel)

This congregation was not inward focused, but outward focused. The powerful,

transformative message of the gospel became part of their “life-share” beyond their gatherings.

“Most people are keepers of the aquarium, not fishers of men.” —Vance Havner

Jesus’ first call was to Peter and His last call was to the church to go forth with the gospel. The primary, ordinary work of the church meant they were “takin’ it to the streets!” Gospel-witness was part of the “distribution” of the church and they were carriers. They were a contagious congregation of the gospel.

The gospel is a trust (a stewardship) in and through our lives. We must all see ourselves as carriers and conveyors of the gospel. Church activity can never be a substitute for gospel saturation in our community.

- Vacation Bible School is a way we share and engage
- Community service days
- Local ministry care and support
- Verbal witness of Jesus Christ. I want, need and pray for more of this in my life. I don’t

want to just be known as the pastor of Warren or a preacher on TV. I want to be heard as a believer whose life has been changed by Jesus and whose life is gathered with others to celebrate and distribute the message of His grace—gospel conversations!

What is a gospel conversation? It is a conversation that gives expression to the reality of brokenness in a fallen world—our inability to reconcile our brokenness apart from God’s intervention—and the good news that God entered our brokenness and bore the painful judgment of our fallenness in Jesus. Jesus in my place! And that God, in grace, reclaims sinners and makes them saints through His mercy and love. We are part of a community of redeemed people!

They Gave All Their Thanks to God

Acts 2:46-47

Note they received what they had with glad and generous hearts. What kind of generosity? Praising God. The end and outward expression of their heart was that of thanksgiving and praise to God.

Are you grateful or do you take for granted the grace of God in your life? ... where you live?... what you have?... how God has blessed and provided for you?

“Worship is giving God the best that He has given you. Be careful what you do with the best you have. Whenever you get a blessing from God, give it back to Him as a love gift. Take time to meditate before God and offer the blessing back to Him as a deliberate act of worship.” —Oswald Chambers

Let's be sure we never fail to give thanks and glory to God for all He does and has done. Worship is recognition of God's grace and goodness to you and through us together.

Note the progression and end result: growth, expansion, fruit, and ultimately, multiplication!

The early church was not perfect—none were. They had problems because they had people. However, they were growing in grace. And this is my prayer for you: By God's grace and for His glory, we might be a church that magnifies the name of Jesus and declares His name for generations yet to come. The same Spirit in them, in us!