

DISCIPLESHIP WEEK 2: GROW

The Message That Saved Us, Is the Same One that Grows us!

[slide: discipleship graphic]

Greeting

Good morning! My name is Jeff Sparks—one of the pastors here at Colonial—and I'm so pleased to be with you again at this morning as we continue our 4-week series on Discipleship. Last week, Week 1, we looked at when and where Discipleship began; the moment in Matthew 4 when Jesus calls to his first disciples in Matthew 4:19

“And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.’”

Segue

After last Sunday's message, some of you requested that—in this morning's sermon—if I used a Greek word to please put the Greek word on the screen, not just its pronunciation. That's a great request!

“εὐχαριστω!”

(eu-charis-to)

Thank You!

This morning, we will look at our 2nd essential discipleship idea—Grow.

Just as the disciples left everything to follow Jesus and **grew** from spiritual infants to mature disciples, we, too, can expect the same transformation. As Jesus poured Himself into the first disciples, in the same way, He pours His life into us through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit transforms us, too, grows us, and equips us to live out our calling to be disciples who make disciples.

Now that's a beautiful picture!

How do we—wherever we are at in our growth, get to that ultimate picture of being Mature in Christ?

This brings us to today's message: Growing in Christ.

AND THAT IS EXACTLY THE SERMON THAT WAS COMPLETED BY THURSDAY MORNING! MY SLIDES WERE TURNED IN, the SERMON MANUSCRIPT READY TO BE DISTRIBUTED . . . WHEN ERVING WALKED INTO MY OFFICE JUST BEFORE NOON THIS PAST THURSDAY.

Our text this morning is from John's Gospel, Chapter 15, 1-5. As we do every week, please stand and let us read the Word together:

Text: John 15:1-8

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. 3 Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. 7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

You May Be Seated. Let's Pray.

PRAYER

Father God, we thank You for Your Word, Your Gospel, through which you have called us to Your Son, and brought Salvation to us. Draw us closer to You this morning and open our hearts to receive Your truth, knowing that the Word that Saved us, is the Same Word that Grows us. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.

WHAT HAPPENED THURSDAY

[SLIDE] THE MAN WITH THE OPEN DOOR.

ERVING'S STORY . . .

This is how we make disciples!

[SLIDE] PRAY, BE IN THE WORD, BE AVAILABLE, AND GOD WILL LEAD A PERSON TO YOU OR YOU TO A PERSON.

[Pastor Jeff shares some examples of this]

Then ask this question:

[SLIDE—KEEP UP UNTIL NEXT ILLUSTRATION] “WOULD YOU LIKE TO READ THE BIBLE WITH ME?”

Repeat.

Now, I want you to say this out loud with me: “Would you like to read the Bible with me?”

Then pick a time next week. That’s it. That’s how simple it is to Make Disciples.

There are people around you already doing this—they’re just quiet about it.

Many think that you have to do this with 20 people!

You do this with ONE (1) person. Anyone can do this.

[SLIDE] PRAY, BE IN THE WORD, BE AVAILABLE AND GOD WILL LEAD A PERSON TO YOU OR YOU TO A PERSON.

But if everyone

You don’t need a book, you only need a sheet of paper.

How is this happening?

Next Illustration.



OPENING ILLUSTRATION

[Slide: Photo. Hampton Court]

During his reign, King Henry VIII built a little country “getaway” outside of London called Hampton Court. It is there at Hampton estates—many years and several Kings later—that another King of Britain imported a grapevine from Germany—the Black Hamburg Dessert Grape—and planted it on the estate in 1768.

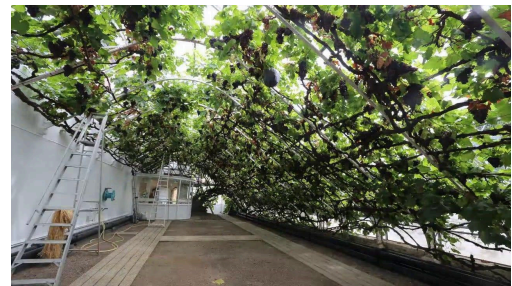
[Slide: Photo. Grape Cluster]

At 256 years old, it is enormous! And it’s not only the oldest Grapevine in the world, it’s the largest!

[Slide: Photo. The Great Vine]

This grapevine has one stem 12 feet thick in circumference; and many of the branches are over 120 feet long!

Despite its age, the vine still produces whopping 1/2 ton of the sweetest dessert grapes each year because all of these vines are connected to the old but fruitful stem.



[Slide: Photo. Soil] The roots of the stem are so expansive that the vine-dressers of Hampton Court allow nothing else to grow on the fertile soil above the root system so that no nourishment is siphoned away by weeds and other plants.



After all, the vines owe their fruit to the nourishment of that one old root, and year after year, the vines produce bunch after bunch of the sweetest fruit dessert grape.

Last Week: “Follow”

Last week, in Matthew 4, we saw that when Jesus calls the first disciples to “Follow Me” it is through His Word and His Work that a divine act of creation takes place.

If you recall, Jesus uses a word reserved for God Creating something out of nothing—that divine act of creation for his disciples, for his followers, is that He will create, He will make, them “Fishers of Men.”

And those first disciples Grew . . . and they kept growing until they became—just as Jesus promised—“Fishers of Men”, or as Jesus would say later in Matthew “Disciples who Make Disciples.”

Through the Holy Spirit at work in our lives, that divine act of creation continues in us, creating in us, making in us, just like the first disciples in the Gospels.

This Week: “Grow”

This imagery of the Vine is one of the most enduring pictures of our lifelong apprenticeship to Jesus. The comforting picture is captured beautifully in v. 5

[Slide: John 15:5 Wall Art]

The simple picture Jesus provides to us is easy to understand: GROWTH will happen to us—He will create growth in us—as we abide in Him.

**[SLIDE] PRAY, BE IN THE WORD, AND BE AVAILABLE.
GOD WILL LEAD A PERSON TO YOU OR YOU TO A PERSON.**

And the GROWTH will produce undeniable evidence: we will bear much fruit.

This is a powerful image of our GROWTH being wholly dependent on CHRIST and wholly connected to him. To follow Jesus is to be formed by Jesus. And in practical terms, we will grow and we will bear fruit because we are formed by JESUS to do that!



FORMATION (Abide with Jesus)

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me, you can do nothing.” (John 15:5)

To be formed by Jesus, we must be with Him . . . PRAYER and HIS WORD.

WE'RE ABIDING IN HIM! He creates and forms us to be like Him because we are Abiding in Him.

Every Christian vine, connected to the branch of our life-giving Lord, grows through training.

In the New Testament there are many different words that express some aspect of TRAINING. For the most part, all of these words fall into two categories of training that leads to growth for all who ABIDE IN JESUS:

Skills Training (protect, strengthen, and nourish)

Character Training (training in righteousness)

Both are types of training are necessary for our complete growth.

Skills Training

In our Spiritual Growth, the Bible teaches us many practices and techniques that protect us, grow skills, and nourish us. We always want to actively seek this type of TRAINING.

1 Timothy 4:6-8

6b being **trained** [nourished] in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. 7 Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather **train** [strengthen] yourself for godliness; 8 for while bodily training [strengthening] is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

Timothy was instructed by the Apostle Paul to take this analogy of physical strength training and apply it to his life and the lives of his congregation so that they all might keep growing towards Spiritual Maturity.

This is the same way the writer of Hebrews instructs his readers:

Hebrews 5:14

¹⁴ But solid **food** [nourishment] is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment **trained** [strengthened] by constant practice to distinguish good from evil

This type of SKILLS TRAINING points to a lifelong practice of conforming their hearts and their lives to SCRIPTURE. The practice of good bible training results in a life of the Holy Spirit working through “The Words of the Faith” (Through Scripture) to “CREATE” in us “branches” // a FRUITFUL, GODLY, life constantly nourished by the life-giving teachings of God’s word.

This type of training is the most common in churches. The vast majority of groups in every church are SKILLS TRAINING Groups. This is wonderful. However . . . it’s not enough.

We also need to invest in the second type of training laid out in Scripture that Formation into Christ-likeness (the MAKING, JESUS is creating in us to be “little Christs” is found in a different type of training.

Character Training—character training (training in righteousness)

What makes Paideia so important is that this is the internal training of character formation; how we become “Christ Like” is training in righteousness.

2 Timothy 3:16

16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,

This training forms our righteousness. It’s the same sort of training a father exercises over a son to mold his character—whether that’s God as our Father who disciplines us for our good or our human fathers who seek to train us in ways of the Lord.

In the very next verse (2 Tim 3:17), the training concept is developed further.

17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

By being ‘trained’ in righteousness, the man of God is CREATED TO BE competent or proficient BY THE WORD OF THE LORD. It’s the ‘training’ in righteousness that leads to the deep, inner change within us. It’s not a skill we receive, but the quality of CHRIST’S character passed on to us to BE DISCIPLES WHO MAKE DISCIPLES.

For the Apostle Paul, the only way this training is accomplished is through passing it on to someone else. Like a baton being passed as in a relay—and that baton is the gospel itself.

God entrusts the PROCLAMATION OF THE Gospel to Paul:
11 in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted. (1 Timothy 1:11)

Paul entrusts the PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL to Timothy:
18 This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, 19 holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith.

Paul wants Timothy to entrust the PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL to faithful people who will go and do the same:
2 and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.

[SLIDE] PRAY, BE IN THE WORD, AND BE AVAILABLE. GOD WILL LEAD A PERSON TO YOU OR YOU TO A PERSON.

CLOSING ILL: PRUNING The Great Vine

[Slide: Photo Pruning]

Pruning may be good for roses and vines and fruit trees, but most people, personally, don't like to be pruned.



Remember The Great Vine at Hampton Court?

The vinedressers are master pruners.

Once the new shoots are about ½ inch long, it is time for pruning to reduce the number of new shoots. The remaining shoots grow until they are (12"-18") long. Immediately after flowering, the number of bunches are again reduced and the remaining bunches are pruned so the fruit is more bountiful.

Pruning keeps the vine productive.

Pruning looks devastating at times, nothing left but stems. Yet pruning brings better grapes or more abundant fruit.

The same is true for us.

Actively meeting with just 1 PERSON Every Week for 1 year is Passing the baton to others, walking with them when the pruning takes place, THIS is at the heart of DISCIPLE-MAKING.

What is so interesting—this is the type of training most rare in churches because at its heart, one person to another to pass on an inheritance to you.

Colonial has always valued and emphasized Mentoring, and although we always have room to improve, every ministry of our church is passionate about renewing our emphases in Mentoring and being mentored. This is where the growth occurs that leads to all other types of Growth.one another; why being mentored and mentoring others is essential to discipleship.

CLOSING

[working on the final closing call to action]

- Next Week week 3: Pastor Mark — Serve / Imitation
- Then in Week 4: Pastor Tami returns from Sabbatical with her message on “Bearing Fruit” / Multiplication

Closing Prayer