

Leading by Faith
Session #4: Growing in Virtue

Review – Welcome Back!

- Faith
- Family Background
- Current Family
- Personality
- Pain & Loss
- Interests
- Relationships
- Vocation
- Aptitudes
- Experiences
- Leadership Style

Discussion – What one leadership lesson in which category impacted you from last session?

Assignments:

- Don't forget to sign in.
- Identify someone in the room that you don't know that well. Person to person or couple to couple. Have them at your house or go to lunch after church or dinner or go to coffee. To get to know them. Get it done tonight.

Growing in Virtue

In this course, we are learning how to lead by faith. Faith leaders walk with God, understand human purpose, and know themselves. Faith leaders also grow in virtue. A leader who is not growing in the virtue of Jesus can't lead by faith very well at all.

In this session, I will answer these **Four Questions About Growing in Virtue**:

- 1. What is the virtue of Jesus?**
- 2. To what extent can we grow in the virtue of Jesus?**
- 3. How do we grow?**
- 4. What do WE do to grow?**

Let's start with #1 – What is the virtue of Jesus?

- The answer to that question is grounded in the theological foundation of our second session.
- We were made in God's image to image Jesus.

In some ways, no human being can be like Jesus, not just in terms of extent of character, but also in terms of some of who he is.

- He is the eternal, infinite and flawless second person of the Triune God.
- Therefore, he is in an entirely different category of life than every other human being and no human being can or should seek to imitate him in those four ways. Eternal. Infinite. Flawless. Trinitarian.

First, human beings cannot become eternal or even reflect it.

- By definition, eternal is something a being is or is not, not something a being can *become*.
- Becoming eternal is a logical contradiction.
- Human beings are creatures who all were once not, but then at one time became alive within the concept of time. We are not trying to reflect his eternality.

Second, human beings cannot become infinite in power, presence, or knowledge.

- We exist in one place as relatively impotent creatures with limited brain capacity.
- We aren't trying to reflect Christ's infinitude.

Third, human beings cannot become flawless during this earthly life.

- Sin is an inseparable part of fallen human nature during this present fallen age.
- Every human being except for Jesus Christ has been sinful since birth, even sinful from conception, and is sinful during their entire earthly life.
- So, we are not aiming to reflect Christ's flawlessness.

Fourth, human beings cannot possess God's nature or become Trinitarian.

- God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Each person is fully God. There is one God.
- In contrast, each human is one person in one human nature. We are not aiming to reflect Trinitarianism.

It is impossible to become like Jesus in some ways.

- In fact, I think trying to image him in these four ways is sinful, even Satanic.
- I think it is Satan's aim to be like God in ways no creature is meant to be like God.

That all said, we can become more like Christ in terms of his virtue.

- Jesus Christ has identifiable, divinely virtuous traits that uniquely originate in God.
- Only Christ demonstrates these attributes in their fullness, but human beings can—and in fact were created to—reflect these attributes in a genuine sense. To image him in these ways.

Jesus Christ's attributes can be and have been described in many ways ever since the first century. I have identified 13 virtues of Christ that humans can reflect.

The virtue of Jesus is love, peace, hope, kindness, goodness, joy, self-control, gentleness, wisdom, humility, zeal, patience and faithfulness.

- I do not claim that these 13 are the only way to describe his virtue.
- Just the way I do that has helped me. How did I choose them?

First, I chose love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control because:

- the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Christ,
- who is active in Christians to produce Christlikeness in us,
- and that Christlikeness he produces in us is called the fruit of the Spirit. Look at Galatians 5:22-23:

²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV)

I love the way that is said. Against such things there is no law.

- In other words, go after as much of this virtue as possible.
- Be as much like Jesus in these ways as you can be, in these nine virtues.
- You can't get enough of God.

Now, I have 13, not 9, because Galatians 5:22-23 does not indicate that it is an exhaustive description of Christ's virtue.

- So, I turned my attention to significant Bible study to discover what else could be added.
- What dimensions of Christ's virtue are missing if we only described him these nine ways?

The 1st virtue I added to the list of the fruit of the Spirit was wisdom.

I read, reflected on, and wrote notes about every occurrence of the word wisdom & its cognates in the entire Bible.

- The fact that there is a section in the Bible called wisdom literature made me think it should be included.
- But, the most important reason I added it is that Jesus Christ is described as the ultimate manifestation of wisdom and that he wants human beings to grow in wisdom. Look at 1 Corinthians 1:24:

²⁴But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

1 Corinthians 1:24 (ESV)

Jesus is the wisdom of God.

- And there are commands that tell us to be wise, like he is wise.
- So, the list grew to 10.

Then, I added hope.

- I used the same methodology that I used for the wisdom project.
- The most important conclusion was similar: Jesus Christ is described as the ultimate source of hope, and he wants human beings to grow in hope. Look at Titus 2:13:

¹³waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,

Titus 2:13 (ESV)

Jesus is our hope.

- And there are commands that tell us to be filled with hope as he is the source of hope.
- So, the list grew to 11.

Then, over the course of some months, I thought about those eleven-character traits, prayerfully reflected on what might be missing from the list and identified two more.

- The 12th one that came to my mind was zeal.
- Maybe because Phinehas was commended so highly and told he was the recipient of an everlasting covenant in Numbers 25:13,
- but probably because of Romans 12:11.

**¹¹Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.
Romans 12:11 (ESV)**

We are commanded to literally “boil over” with the Spirit.

- Picture a pot on a stove. Water at a rolling boil. Bubbles overflowing.
- Jesus has been filled with the Spirit since conception, and he wants us to be zealous like he is zealous.

The last character trait that came to my mind was humility.

- Philippians 2:5-8 indicates both that Christ is humble,
- and that God wants us to be humble as he is humble.

⁵Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Philippians 2:5-8 (ESV)

Jesus is the most humble person ever.

- We are commanded to imitate him.
- So, the list to describe him grew to 13

Then, after completing this list of thirteen, I reviewed the attributes of God sections from several systematic theologies, and other books, and I concluded that my list sufficiently described the virtue of Jesus.

There are certainly others that we could pick like grace or mercy,

- but I tried to focus on virtue that God has been displaying in eternity past,
- and grace and mercy seem to be virtue involved in dealing with sinners and thus a subset of greater virtues like love, goodness, patience, etc.

If you want to choose your own list, feel free to do so, but make sure the list is Biblical and comprehensive. I also have definitions of all 13 created from all their Biblical occurrences.

If that is the virtue of Jesus, it is important to answer the question, to what extent can we grow in these?

- I know I am a realist, but I think this is important, especially if you are an idealist.
- We can be too negative and too positive in our efforts to become more like Jesus.

To what extent can we grow in the 13 virtues I have identified?

- I think it is helpful to speak about dimly reflecting Jesus.
- Jesus has restored his image in us.
- And that means we can be a dim reflection of him, the perfect image. I don't think we can be much more than a dim reflection.

That's the language the Bible seems to use about the Spirit's work in us. This time we live in now of being a Redeemed Image is a _____ of the _____ we get as a Resurrected Image.

Down Payment – Full Inheritance

¹⁴who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

Ephesians 1:14 (ESV)

That word guarantee is our word for down payment.

- If someone gives you a down payment for something, it is usually a very partial payment. 10%, 20%, etc. The full payment is coming later.
- Our experience of transformation from depravity to virtue in this life is very partial. It's a down payment.

Foretaste – Entire Meal

⁹And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”

Revelation 19:9 (ESV)

The marriage supper of the Lamb is the future celebration of Christ’s return which will produce our resurrection, and the New Heavens and New Earth.

- And it will eliminate sin from within us.
- We will be completely virtuous like him at that future date.

The fact that this marriage supper is prophesied in the future is an indication that we don’t get that dinner now.

- What we get is a foretaste of it. God is cooking up an eternal meal, and now all we get is a sip from the spoon.
- Our experience of transformation from depravity to virtue in this life is very partial. It’s a foretaste.

First Fruits – Harvest

²³And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Romans 8:23 (ESV)

The spirit dwelling in us now is a first fruit, which is a farming term for the earliest yield of the harvest.

- They were the beginning of it.
- Likewise, God’s work in us now is just the beginning.

We have been adopted spiritually and we have been redeemed spiritually, but there's coming a day when our bodies and the entire universe will be adopted and redeemed.

- That is the resurrection.
- Our experience of transformation now from depravity to virtue is very partial. It's a first fruit.

Seal – Complete Possession

²²**and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.**

2 Corinthians 1:22 (ESV)

The word 'guarantee' is down payment, which we covered, but the word 'seal' was an ancient official mark stamped in wax to indicate someone owned what was sealed and would come to take possession of it.

- We are possessed in a way by the Spirit now, but we will be completely possessed in the resurrection.
- Our experience of transformation now from depravity to virtue is very partial. It's a seal.

I don't think I am aiming low by using the language of dim reflection as it is Biblical and, furthermore:

Jesus Christ's glory shines so bright that the greatest possible human aspiration is to simply be a dim reflection of him.

- Dimly reflecting Jesus is incredibly powerful, like a dirty mirror reflecting the sun.
- You stare into that dirty mirror, and it will still blind you!

This is important, because it sets the proper expectations for our efforts to grow in the virtue of Jesus.

- That is, foolishness will always taint our life on earth no matter how wise we become.
- Misery will always invade our soul no matter how joyful we become.
- Selfishness will always wage war against us no matter how loving we become.
- But we can become more wise and joyful and loving! We can and do change.
- We are not Distorted Images, nor are we Resurrected Images. We are Redeemed Images.

I have experienced overly idealistic people who get really discouraged because they think it's the full meal now. It's an over realized personal eschatology.

- I have also experienced overly pessimistic people who think dimly reflecting isn't much at all because they don't have a high enough view of Jesus as the image.
- Again, Jesus Christ's glory shines so bright that the greatest possible human aspiration is to simply be a dim reflection of him.

Discussion – The virtue of Jesus is love, peace, hope, kindness, goodness, joy, self-control, gentleness, wisdom, humility, zeal, patience and faithfulness. Which of these three are you feeling the need to grow in? Why?

We have defined the virtue of Jesus & explained to what extent we can grow in virtue. The 3rd question is **How Do We Grow?**

- The answer is **We grow in faith, understanding, and virtue.** God is active in that process and so are we.
- First, the Scriptures refer to a growth in faith. Look at 2 Thessalonians 1:3.

We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly.

2 Thessalonians 1:3 (ESV)

The Apostle Paul acknowledged how good it is when we see someone we know growing in their faith.

- We should thank God for that because it means that the Lord is actively at work in them.
- Jesus deserves the credit for that Christian growth. That is, growth in faith.

A person can have weak faith or strong faith.

- The constitution of our faith can grow. The strength of it.
- Those with weak faith find it more difficult to trust God in a given situation. Those with strong faith find it easier to do so. We want to grow from weak to strong.

And the amount of our faith can grow. The size of it.

- A person can have little faith or much faith.
- Those with little faith seem to trust God in a small number of ways. Those with much faith find it easier to trust God in all kinds of ways. We want to grow from little to much.

Second, the Scriptures refer to a growth in *understanding* overall in life, in the Scriptures, but for our topic, particularly related to the Gospel.

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

1 Peter 2:2 (ESV)

The Apostle Peter referred to new Christians as newborn infants in the Lord.

- The pure spiritual milk is the word of God, but not as we might think of the entire written word of God, the Bible,
- but 1:25 makes it clear that the word he referred to was the good news that was preached to them, the Gospel.

New Christians needed to be regularly nursed by the Gospel to grow up.

- They needed to increase in the knowledge of Jesus.
- They need to grow in their understanding of him.

The Apostle Paul shared this view of Peter.

- He taught the Corinthians to understand the Gospel at a basic level.
- And he wanted to dig deeper into it but wrote that they couldn't handle solid food. They hadn't grown in their understanding enough.
- The writer of the Hebrews wrote something similar in chapter 6 of that book.

The Apostle Paul seemed to have more success with the Colossians.

- In chapter 1 of that letter, he wrote about how he labored with all his might teaching the gospel,
- so that every Christian in Colossae would become mature, healthy functioning Christian adults, complete, not lacking any knowledge of the gospel.

There is an immaturity to maturity continuum when it comes to grasping what is taught about Jesus, and growth is the path to maturity.

- The Bible teaches that we grow in our understanding overall in the Christian life,
- but particularly related to understanding of the Gospel.

Third and lastly on how the three ways we grow, the Scriptures refer to a growth in virtue—

- that is, a growth in obedience and good deeds as a result of growth in the Christ-like character from which that comes.
- Ephesians 4 references the group nature of that growth since character is inevitably relational and the prime virtue which is love.

¹⁵We are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and held together...so that it builds itself up in love.

Ephesians 4:15-16 (ESV)

We start out as new Christians, undeveloped in our inner life re: character, and thus immature in our ability to obey and perform good deeds.

- The goal of the Christian is to increase and abound in virtue.
- God has not set a limit regarding how much virtue we should want and pursue and manifest. Galatians 5:23...against these things there is no law, right?

Growth in faith. Growth in understanding. Growth in virtue.

- And I think these three aspects of Christian growth are related.
- They are not separate things that are mutually exclusive to each other.

The more faith a Christian has, the more they will truly understand God.

- The more understanding they have of the Gospel, the more substantive their virtue will be and the more proficient they will be at obedience and good deeds.
- The more faith a Christian has, the more understanding, the more virtue.
- 2 Peter 1:3 is a helpful summary on this topic:

³His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him.

2 Peter 1:3 (ESV)

The divine power gives us everything we need...

- to grow in all the ways God wants us to grow,
- and that power is accessed through the knowledge of Christ, the Gospel.

Now, there are all kinds of analogies for Christian growth.

- The most common way it is described is as **a linear graph**: a continual, linear, two-dimensional, upward phenomenon.
- Maybe not the graph perfectly going up, but more like the one that is **staggered in nature**.

Most pastors and theologians seem to hold this view.

- Christian growth is progressive. You make progress towards the goal.
- You increase in your character over time. You become more like Christ as your life goes on. It's progressive.

But it is also imperfect, that's why the one that is staggered better reflects reality.

- You take two steps forward in your character and one step back.
- You end up at a higher degree of virtue than when you started but it wasn't always constantly going up. It was an imperfect line.

In other words, when you become a Christian, you are not a lot like Jesus. Then, you grow.

You become more and more and more like Jesus in every way, as might be portrayed by a line on a graph where

- the x-axis represents the years of your life and
- the y-axis represents Christ-likeness.

Growth is you reflecting the image of God in Christ in an ever-increasing way.

- You will never reach Christlikeness in this world, of course,
- but you grow, and if you are not going upward, something is wrong with you or what you are doing.

The Scriptures, however, present Christian growth in more complex terms than this two-dimensional monolithic model.

- I have just presented three different ways the Scripture describes Christian growth: in Gospel understanding, in faith, and in virtue.
- So, we would at least need three graphs, right?
- But I don't think a linear graph is helpful. It's a misunderstanding of 2 Cor 3:18.

I guess the linear model is okay to use when describing growing in faith. That aspect of Christian growth.

- It's adequate, but it still needs to be used carefully in that regard, because, though it is godly to want to grow in both the strength and amount of our faith, the presence of a just a little faith is what is of ultimate importance.
- Navel gazing about the measure of one's faith can detract from the glory of the one in whom we have faith.

A better analogy for growing in faith might be **exercise**.

- Increasing faith requires working out.
- The more curls you do, the bigger the biceps get. The more you put faith into practice, the stronger your faith gets.

The more variety of exercises you do, the larger your body grows in muscle.

- Likewise, as you increase the variety of situations in which you trust God, the larger your faith will become.
- While the linear model is okay for growth in faith, I think exercise is better. It speaks to the need for disciplines of faith.

And I think the linear model for understanding Christian growth is very unhelpful for the other two aspects – understanding and virtue.

- It is better to use the **analogy of a fruit tree** when describing growth in understanding the Gospel and in character.
- Growth of understanding the gospel corresponds to physical growth of the tree and growth in virtue corresponds to fruit.

Think about it like this.

- A Christian is like a tree planted in gospel ground when he responds to the good news about Jesus.
- Our growth to a maturity of understanding the gospel is nourished by all of the scriptural themes that describe the saving work of Jesus Christ.

Let's call them "gospel nutrients":

- adoption, revelation, condescension, incarnation,
- propitiation, resurrection, ascension, mediation,
- regeneration, justification, redemption, sanctification,
- commission, and glorification.

Learning these aspects of the gospel in depth is the means by which a Christian goes from a seed to a sapling to a big tree with a sturdy trunk.

- While the Christian learns and grows in understanding, we produce some fruit, the fruit of virtue:
- sacrifice, praise and thanksgiving, reconciliation, moderation, giving, compassion, wise choices, encouragement, perseverance, evangelism, volunteerism, submission, and prayer to name a few.

Then, when we reach maturity, continued growth in understanding is not absent, but it is not the emphasis.

- The emphasis changes to seasons of fruit.
- It is to be continually refreshed by the same gospel nutrients every day so that he will continue to produce the fruit of virtue as a mature gospel-understanding person.

That is Psalm 1 to me:

Blessed is the man... (whose) 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.

Psalm 1:1-3 (ESV)

The Christian meditates on the fulfillment of the law, Jesus, through his Gospel.

- And the result is Christians become mature in faith and knowledge. And they produce fruit of his virtue in seasons.
- Growth in virtue isn't best described as linear and progressive, but as multi-faceted and seasonal.
- Why do I think this is the best analogy? Here are three **Benefits of the Fruit Tree Analogy.**

1. Insight into God's Sovereignty – I think the metaphor of a fruit tree can be a helpful to describe the role of God's sovereignty in Christian growth. It can bring more understanding to what God does.

God is at work in your Christian growth.

- Just as he controls the temperature, the sun, the heat and the cold, just as he rules the time—night and day,
- just as he is in charge of the weather conditions like wind, calm, rain, sleet, hail, and tornados;
- and all these contribute to a fruit trees growth and the amount of fruit...

So does God's providence arrange the circumstances of your life,

- directing and contributing to certain aspects of your Christian growth in faith, understanding and virtue.
- Some people have more faith than others because God has given them more faith.

Some because the station God put them in created more faith.

- Some people have more understanding because of the way God wired them.
- Some people have more character because of the environment they live in.

Further, this analogy of the fruit tree reminds us of the ways that we are completely dependent on God for growth.

- As the tree needs the water and the sun and the nutrients in the ground, we need the work of the Spirit.
- If we uprooted a fruit tree and laid it on the parking lot, it would die. Same with us.

The Spirit gives us life and sustains our life.

- There is no such thing as a Christian life outside of Christ.
- His life is powerfully working in us to strongly motivate us to struggle and labor to grow and bear fruit.

This analogy helps us understand that love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, and so on,

- is the life of Christ active in us, not a life that we inherently have or can manufacture on our own.
- That's the first benefit. 2nd...

2. Sets Healthy Expectations – I think this metaphor sets healthy expectations for us about our Christian growth.

It avoids the oppressive effect of any kind of higher life theology. That the standard is a full tree of fruit all the time.

- No, some seasons of life you are going to have less joy than you did before.
- That doesn't mean that there you are a substandard Christian. Could simply mean it's a cold winter.

This metaphor helps comfort us during times when we are unsure about our relationship with God.

- We are in Gospel ground. He put us there. We didn't do it ourselves.
- And do we see some fruit. Is there a piece of fruit on the tree? Well, that can only be done by God. So, we must be a Christian!

This metaphor frees us from the yolk of spiritual navel gazing, always analyzing how much we are growing. Have I made progress today? Am I better this week? Etc.

- And it informs those fruitless winter experiences of the Christian life that can all too often be misinterpreted as "backsliding" or rebellion.
- That's 2nd. Healthy expectations. 3rd...

3. Focus for Our Responsibility – I also think the metaphor of a fruit tree can be a helpful to describe human activity in Christian growth. Help us focus on what Christians do.

Think about how we grow in virtue in fruit tree terms:

- The Christian is planted in gospel ground.
- Working to put roots down in the gospel, soaking up the nutrients of the gospel.
- Stretching and growing because of those nutrients, producing fruit.

It focuses us on what we should do: soak up the nutrients of the gospel to nourish our obedience like Psalm 1 describes.

- Growth in virtue is not like a continual, linear, two-dimensional, upward phenomenon that is produced simply by learning new information.
- Some Christians fall prey to that idea and actually leave the gospel behind as old information.
- Their model of Christian growth takes them away from the means for Christian growth!

The main word to remember, not the only one, but the main one, about how to grow is remember. Remember Jesus.

- Remind yourself of the Gospel. Got to understand it and remember it.
- If you don't do that, the rest of your efforts are in vain.

If you are not a fruit tree artistic type person, and more mathematical, perhaps this math formula will help you think about your responsibility in growing in virtue.

- That's the fourth question I said I would answer tonight.
- **What Do WE Do to Grow?** Specifically in virtue. Here's a simple way...

Disciplines of Faith + Gospel Truth => The Virtue of Jesus

- Trust...in Jesus to forgive your personal sin...yields you doing right as worship of Jesus now.
- Reliance...on Christ to overthrow your indwelling sin by his Holy Spirit...produces a Christian life, a life patterned after the virtue of Christ.
- Belief...in the Lord to return and undo all the effects of original sin in this fallen world...leads to you pleasing God during this life while we wait to see him face-to-face.

Disciplines of Faith + Gospel Truth => The Virtue of Jesus.

- This is in the Bible in a lot of places,
- But look at Titus 1:1 to see it most plainly and clearly:

¹Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness,

Titus 1:1 (ESV)

That phrase “accords with godliness” grammatically modifies both the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth.

In other words, the Apostle Paul asserts here in Titus 1 that faith + Gospel truth, that is Christian faith, accords with godliness.

- It lines up with being like God as a human.
- It results in the virtue of Jesus.

The works of God, acting like God would act, doing good from the heart, etc.,

- come from people who know the truth about Jesus and believe the truth about Jesus.
- The virtue of Christ is the fruit of genuine Christian faith.
- The Gospel is intended to produce more Christlikeness in people.

I use the phrase disciplines of faith because there are many verses in the Bible that connect a lifestyle of trusting God + Gospel truth to the formation of Christian virtue in you. Like Colossians 2:6-7:

⁶Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, ⁷rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

Colossians 2:6-7 (ESV)

In other words, generally speaking, the more faith you have and the more Gospel truth you know, the more you will become like Jesus.

- God doesn't want more *from* you given to him.
- He doesn't need anything *from* you.
- Rather, he wants to produce MORE in you & through you. More of his character.

God desires for you to learn MORE and MORE about Jesus, and to regularly be reminded of what you know. More Gospel truth.

God wants you to trust Christ MORE when it comes to the forgiveness of your personal sin.

- God desires that you would rely on the Spirit of Christ MORE when it comes to battling indwelling sin.
- God wants you to believe MORE in the return of Christ as the way you cope with original sin and all its effects.
- MORE faith...disciplines of faith.

He wants you, not just to have decided about Jesus long ago, but to have a living faith every day that is cultivated by habits in your life, and on your calendar. That's how we grow in the virtue of Jesus.

Notice then, I don't think we become more like Jesus with truth alone.

- It needs to be Gospel truth because the Gospel provides both the guide for our faith but also the motivation to be disciplined in our faith.
- It's Disciplines of Faith + Gospel Truth => The Virtue of Jesus

I work out 3 times per week, 2 if I am busy or away or something.

- I am not a fan of working out, but I am in the habit of doing it.
- One of my motivations is my wife, not to look good for her, but she wants to work out and gets me fired up about working out.

Just like I need that ongoing motivation (of Cindy) to do what I know I should do and want to do in theory (workout), we all need ongoing motivation to practice the disciplines of faith.

That's what the Gospel does for us.

- It's not just that we need to grow in our understanding of the Gospel to grow in virtue.
- Remembering the Gospel also helps us grow in our disciplines of faith.

It is the fuel for our engine.

- It is the spiritual food for our soul. It feeds our faith.
- That's what the Bible teaches. It's in Romans 1. Look at Romans 1:13-15:

¹³I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles. ¹⁴I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. ¹⁵So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

Romans 1:13-15 (ESV)

Have you noticed that before? Interesting.

- The Apostle Paul wanted to go to Rome, planned many times to go to Rome,
- so that he could preach the Gospel to Christians in order to have a harvest among them.

Notice, he wrote in v.15 that he was eager to *preach the Gospel* to them.

- Notice, he called them *brothers* in v.13, a term used to describe fellow Christian men.
- If you look back further, in v.7, you'll notice the letter itself is addressed to the Romans who are "loved by God and called to be saints" – language that described *their Christian commitment*.

If you look back, in v.8, you'll notice he wrote how much he thanked God for them because *their Christian faith* was being reported over the whole Roman Empire.

- These Romans were not just Christians.
- They were Christians with famous faith. Mature Christians.

This idea is worth repeating so that we can soak it in...it may be a new thought to you, even a paradigm shifting thought...

- the Apostle Paul wanted to go to Rome, planned many times to go to Rome, was eager to go to Rome
- so that he could preach the Gospel to Christians, mature Christians with famous faith.

Now there is no question that the Apostle Paul preached the Gospel to non-Christians.

- The book of Acts is filled with his missionary activity –
- preaching the Gospel where Christ was not yet known.

In this very letter to the Romans 15:20, he described his desire to tell the non-Christian world about Jesus, “and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation.”

- Most genuine Christians agree that the Gospel is to be preached to non-Christians.
- That’s how the process of growing in virtue starts.
- Through the proclamation of the gospel, God sends his Spirit to unite people to Jesus Christ so that they can become more like him.

In other words, the Gospel is the message God uses to *create Christians* (Rom 1:16).

- Christians do not come into existence without the preaching of the Gospel.
- Upon conversion through the Gospel, Christians are united with Christ in his death and resurrection life (Rom 6:3-9).

We have been crucified with Jesus (Gal 2:26, 5:24; Rom 6:6).

- We died and rose with him.
- His righteous life has been imputed to us (Phi 3:9).
- We are no longer in Adam but in Christ (1 Cor 15:22).
- We have put off the old man and we have put on the new man (Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:9-11).
- We have been decisively transferred from the realm of the flesh to the realm of the Spirit (Rom 8:5-11).

Though sin remains in our life, the power of its dominion has been officially broken (Gal 5:15-26).

- We are new creations in Christ governed by his Spirit (2 Cor 5:17; Rom 8:9).
- As a result, we can become more like Christ (Wilkins 1992, 32). God uses the Gospel to make that possible.

That's what the Apostle Paul thought.

- That's why he was zealous about preaching the Gospel to non-Christians.
- Most people who study the Bible notice that fact in the Bible.

BUT, a very interesting and often unnoticed fact is that the Apostle Paul was just as zealous about preaching the Gospel to Christians.

- He understood his vocation to be set apart for the Gospel of God, a Gospel preacher to human beings, Christian and non-Christian alike.
- Look @ Romans 1:9-10:

⁹For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you ¹⁰always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.

Romans 1:9-10 (ESV)

The Apostle Paul was zealous about preaching the Gospel, not just to non-Christians, but to Christians. Why?

Why in the world would Paul preach the Gospel to mature Christians with famous faith? Well, it seems Paul was convinced that the Gospel...

- causes *Christians* to live for God.
- is the daily nourishment to our heart needs.
- compels us to live for Christ.

We grow in virtue through growing in disciplines of faith + growing in our understanding of Gospel truth,

- And that one part of Gospel truth helps us be more disciplined in our faith.
- Look again @ Romans 1:13-15:

¹³I have often intended to come to you...in order that I may reap some harvest among you...So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

Romans 1:13-15 (ESV)

Paul wanted a harvest among Christians, that is,

- he wanted them to live lives of obedience to Christ.
- And he connected that harvest of Christ-like living to preaching the Gospel to them.

The more he preached the Gospel.

- The more fruit of the Spirit was produced in the lives of his hearers.
- Romans 1:5 might sum up Paul's conviction on this topic the best...

⁵through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations,

Romans 1:5 (ESV)

In other words, through Christ and for the fame of Christ, Paul was undeservedly given the job description of Gospel preacher to the Gentiles

- so that by the consistent and faithful preaching of the Gospel,
- Gentiles would come to faith and be compelled to obey God.

The Apostle Paul's practice was to preach the Gospel to non-Christians because he believed God worked through the preaching of the Gospel to convert them to Christ.

- Then, he preached the Gospel, re-preached the Gospel, reminded people of the Gospel, explained the Gospel, expounded on the Gospel, taught the Gospel to Christians
- because he believed God worked through the preaching of the Gospel to compel Christians towards disciplines of faith.

For the Apostle Paul, the Gospel was, as v.16 reads, "the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes."

- And, for the Apostle Paul, salvation is past, present and future.
- The Bible uses this language regarding your salvation – you were saved, are being saved and will be saved.

The Gospel is the power of God that converted you. It is also the power of God that nourishes you.

- Paul envisioned that Christians would be established by the Gospel so that all nations would believe the Gospel and live in accordance with the Gospel.
- That's how he closes the epistle to the Romans...

²⁵Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ...to bring about the obedience of faith...

Romans 16:25-26 (ESV)

The Gospel is the power of God in our past conversion and our present transformation, the dynamic energy of God that begins the Christian life and sustains the Christian life.

- God uses the gospel to *make it possible* for us to become more like Christ.
- More than that, God also uses the gospel to *make it happen*, so that we actually do become more like Christ.

To say it still another way, the Holy Spirit lives in us to cause us to want to please God and the primary means by which the Spirit causes us to want to please God is the Gospel.

- Christians have been born again by the Gospel in order to live a Good News Life of becoming more like Jesus Christ.
- We “image Jesus because he has redeemed his image in us,” and that happens through the Disciplines of Faith + Gospel Truth.

That Gospel truth is the most important aspect because it motivates those disciplines.

Okay, quick review of the assignments you have been given so far:

1. Walk with God more deeply and regularly. I gave you a few suggested resources if you need refreshment. Extra credit was to memorize Genesis 6:9. Navy seal challenge was to write out your own personal copy of Deuteronomy.
2. Create a personal profile to demonstrate to yourself and others that you know yourself.
3. Set a date to meet with someone in this leadership community that you don't know very well, to get to know them better.

If you haven't completed those, get working. Take responsibility to be a leader and do them.

Your next assignment is to read a passage of Scripture every day from tomorrow until next session that is specifically related to the virtue that you would like to grow in. **Here is a chart.** So, take a minute right now and write down the verses that you are assigned based on the way you answered the question, what are you feeling the need to grow in.

Leaders walk with God, understand human purpose, know themselves and grow in virtue. Next session, we will focus on battling sin & temptation. This is part of growing, but needs its own session for sure, given the battle we are in. Let's pray.