

“Dare to Grow!”  
by Rom A. Pegram (6/25/17)

I’ve been in ministry now (2<sup>nd</sup> career) about 23 years (if you count my student pastoring). One important lesson I’ve learned over the past 20-some years is this: *There’s absolutely nothing I can do to make you grow spiritually!* Did you know that? I can’t make you grow! I can encourage you; I can try to inspire you; I can do my best to provide an environment in which you can grow ... but, *I can’t make you grow!*

You see, nobody can make you grow. *Only YOU can decide, or choose, to grow spiritually.* No one can do that but YOU! I’m praying that you do, because folks the truth is ... *whatever is not growing ... is dead.* And we don’t need any ‘spiritual zombies.’ So, today, I want to talk with you about choices you (and only you) can make to grow spiritually...

Our DARE TO BE GREAT CHALLENGE—once again—begins with *a great commitment.* That has to come first! ‘Not a *partial obedience*; ‘not a lackluster attempt to appease God. But a full-out commitment to walk with God in your life—*total obedience* to what God has called us to do. *Is that the kind of commitment you have today?* Here’s our DARE TO BE GREAT CHALLENGE again:

“A great commitment to the Great Commandment(s) and the Great Commission, done with Great Compassion, will grow a great church (and great disciples in the process).”

So, it all begins with ... *a great commitment!* Folks, today our focus is going to be on a scripture called ‘The Great Commission’. Today—needless to say, we’re going to be looking at the part of the passage that’s about *growth*. If you’re going to grow spiritually, you’ve got to make some *commitments*. I’m going to do everything I can to encourage you and inspire you, but ultimately *the choice is yours.* *You have to choose to grow!* With that said, here’s The Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20, NLT)...

Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. <sup>17</sup> When they saw him, they worshiped him—but some of them doubted! <sup>18</sup> Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. <sup>20</sup> Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Did you see that ... in the third line of our passage? Make sure you mark this, where Jesus says ‘teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you’ (NLT). Folks, *this is the best definition of spiritual growth I know of.* “Spiritual growth is learning to obey everything Jesus commanded.” And the truth is, the more you learn to obey, the more you’ll grow. And the more you grow, the more obedient you’ll become...

So, God invites each and every one of us to grow in our walk with him. And today, I want to think of spiritual growth as '*God's invitation to the table*'. God invites you to his table where spiritual growth can happen ... and I want you to think of 'God's table' as the church. God says "Come to the table..."

So, you're invited to this table. You can choose to eat or not to eat, you could choose to eat just a little bit, or only unhealthy stuff—*your choice once you're here*. But, the fact is God invites us all to his table ... to eat and to GROW! And *this table has three chairs* that represent the Body of Christ—our church. Let me explain...

**Chair #1** represents a group in our church I call '*pre-Christians*.' Isn't that optimistic? There's a percentage in every church that come to worship, but haven't yet accepted Christ's invitation to eternal life. They may be checking things out—maybe the church, maybe God. They're just in the inquisitive stage—not yet ready to claim Christ as their own. But, *these are valued guests*. I want you to know that. If you put yourself in this chair, you're always welcome. *You have a spot at the table...*

Then, there's **Chair #2**. This is the group of people who are relatively new to the faith. They may be those who've made first-time commitments to Christ recently ... or those who were once connected to Christ, but let that relationship fall away and are now returning to the faith. Maybe you consider yourself to be in Chair #2. And I love those in Chair #2, because this is usually *a stage of quick growth*—a time of real excitement. It can be one of the fastest periods of growth in your life! So, that's exciting—Chair #2...

Finally, there's **Chair #3**. This is where I'd put myself. This chair represents those who have a history of walking with God. It's the maturing chair—*we're growing* or in process. This is where you can look back and see God's faithfulness in the past; it's also where you look forward and say, "I have a future that's very exciting!" and *you want to start giving back and serving the rest of the folks who are at the table...*

So, where are you today? I'm aware we have people in all three chairs. So today, I want to share with you *six spiritual growth tools* that can help you grow in your faith *no matter what chair you're in!* Think of it this way: When you come to *your table*, do you ever outgrow a fork and a knife? NO! It doesn't matter what stage of life you're in, you can always use those tools ... and it's the same with these. Are you ready? And here's what we're saying by picking these tools up: *I will invest in my spiritual growth by...*

**RECEIVING BIBLICAL TEACHING THROUGH WEEKLY WORSHIP.** I didn't go into the ministry until I was in my 30s, but one thing I've always cherished—no matter what side of the pulpit I was on—was solid, biblical teaching. One of the greatest tools we have in our process of spiritual growth is what we're doing right now—gathering together for weekly worship, hearing God's word read & expounded on publicly. *Did you know the Bible actually instructs us to go to church?* The writer of Hebrews reminds us of this great tool for spiritual growth; Hebrews 10:23-25 says: "Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. <sup>24</sup> Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. <sup>25</sup> **And let us not**

**neglect our meeting together**, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.”

Let me show you, now, what I want to call THE SWISS ARMY KNIFE OF WORSHIP: Your Bulletin/Program. Take a look real quick and you'll find tools like...

- *The Bible Reading Plan.* Here's the group who's accepted my challenge to read a part of the Bible each year (then meet once/month to discuss)...
- *The sermon note sheet.* Studies have shown that the average person forgets 50% of what they've heard about 20 minutes after they hear it. So, how will you ever remember some of the things we talk about here in the future if you don't write them down? I've studied enough to know that *taking notes is a great tool!*
- Then there's *the offering envelope*—another tool that'll help you grow spiritually. The Bible actually instructs us, folks, to 'grow in the grace of giving' as a part of our discipleship (2 Cor. 8:7). So, our giving back to God is another essential part of our process of growth...
- Come this fall, we'll have yet another spiritual growth tool for you called the 'Connection Card' that'll be in your bulletin ... and I'll talk more about that later...

If you want to grow, though, you first *decide to grow* ... then *take steps to grow*. Spiritually speaking, I wish everyone was like my son Josh when he was just a tike; I think he went from a roll ... to a full-out run—never really taking baby steps in the process. But, that's not usually the case. We take steps—not only as we grow, but *in order to grow* ... *spiritually*. And if you're hesitant to grow spiritually, we're going to help you with that in days to come (Connection Card). Next, we need to be...

**CONNECTING TO OTHER BELIEVERS WEEKLY.** This one's like *Duct Tape*; you can use it for just about everything because it fixes just about everything. What am I talking about? Connecting with others at church—particularly in growth opportunities: the monthly Round Table for our Bible reading, a Membership Class coming up this fall (Wednesdays) ... or a Lenten Study in the spring. Some believe the key to growth is *going to church* ... and some believe it's *connecting to others in a group setting*; the truth is ... *it's both!* Luke tells us (Early Church/Acts 2:46): “They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity....” They worshipped together publicly, then met in small groups in the home; *it takes both*; next we need to be...

**STUDYING GOD'S WORD DAILY.** The word should be a *daily tool* for you—'a light unto your feet' so to speak!

I don't know if you know about the bird by the name of Cockatiel or not, but if you put a Cockatiel in pitch black and don't have a night light on for them, they can actually have 'night terrors.' They panic, flap around in their cages, and can actually break their wings in the process. They really need to have a night light on—at least that much light...

Not unlike many of us, it's hard to go some place you've never been before ... especially without a light to show you the way. That's what God's word does for us. We never have to panic in life; we never have to have 'night terrors' about anything we're going through. *The Bible is meant to be your light for life* (Ps. 119:105). Turn it on ... daily! And, then we also need another tool; we need to be...

**TALKING WITH GOD IN PRAYER CONSTANTLY.** I look at the Bible as 'God talking to you,' but *God also expects us to talk to him* ... and it's called 'prayer.' Our prayer life needs to be like breathing—that natural to us. We should never stop doing it, because that could be detrimental to our health. We shouldn't even have to think about it; prayer, like breathing, should come to us naturally. Ephesians 6:18 tells us: "Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere." So, TALK WITH GOD CONSTANTLY; next comes this...

**SERVING OTHERS IN MY CHURCH MONTHLY.** Tool #5 is really about the 3<sup>rd</sup> banner—serving God by serving others (which I spoke on last week). Folks, never forget ... *God created you to serve!* 1 Corinthians 12:7: "A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other." God gives us special gifts, why? To help each other! If we'd all commit to serving in one place monthly, we had every job covered in this place; did you know that?

So, our tools for spiritual growth are 1) receiving biblical teaching thru weekly worship, 2) connecting to other believers weekly, 3) studying God's word daily, 4) talking with God in prayer constantly, 5) serving others in my church monthly, and finally...

**SURRENDERING OUR LIFE TO GOD MOMENT BY MOMENT.** This is the one that ties them all together... Folks, surrender—like all of these tools we've looked at today—is a *choice*. It's an ongoing *choice*—a choice to grow, a choice to mature in your relationship with Christ... It's a choice you make. God never forces anyone to follow him ... or to be obedient in all Jesus taught. God never forces you to read the Bible ... or go to church. God offers road signs ... to get your attention if you're not paying attention. But, God never forces...

So it is with *surrender*. The thing about surrender is ... the more you surrender your life to God, the more you will grow. In fact, you could chart your growth as a Christian by saying it's about surrender, surrender and more surrender... So, where are we?

- Chair #1 – you have to surrender your life to Jesus Christ to move to Chair #2...
- Chair #2 – it's about starting to surrender *all* areas of your life to God ... and when you move to...
- Chair #3 – it's all about maturity. You get one area surrendered, then you've got to work on another area; you're constantly going back and forth in this thing called *spiritual growth*—quite an adventure indeed...

Remember, the CROSS is our ultimate reminder of surrender; Jesus didn't have to die there for us; *he chose to*—surrendering his life so that we might have life ... forever! Let

that be your reminder that we need to surrender our lives to him ... moment-by-moment... Paul, in Ephesians 4:15 (MSG), says: “God wants us to grow up, to know the whole truth and tell it in love—like Christ in everything. We take our lead from Christ, who is the source of everything we do.” Folks, are you ready to GROW? DARE TO GROW ... and it will change your life forever...