

Learning Leads to Growing

2 Peter 3:17-18 (Bringing Our Mission into Focus - Learn)

“You need to stop growing!” I feel like I’ve been saying that a lot lately. I see my children growing up so fast. Every time I turn around, it feels like I’m looking at one or all three of them realizing they have outgrown their clothing and shoes. Parents, have you ever felt like that? Your children just seem to grow up right before your eyes and there’s nothing you can do to stop them. Whether we like it or not, children grow. Deep down, even though we may say that they need to stop growing, we do want them to grow. We realize they need to grow. So we help them to grow by doing things like feeding them good, nutritious food.

Like our children, all of God’s people who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus and brought into his Church need to grow in their faith. The Apostle Peter as he closes out his second letter shows us what is coming and what is already happening. In the last chapter, he tells us, **“First know this: In the last days scoffers will come with their mocking, following their own lusts.” (3:3)** There will be opposition and objection to the Word and our faith until the last promise of God is kept, the return of Jesus to judge the world on the Last Day. Peter writes, **“The Lord is not slow to do what he promised, as some consider slowness. Instead, he is patient for your sakes, not wanting anyone to perish, but all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. On that day the heavens will pass away with a roar, the elements will be dissolved as they burn up with great heat, and the earth and what was done on it will be burned up.” (3:9-10)** While we wait for that day to come with joyful anticipation since we know that heaven awaits us because of Jesus, Peter answers for us what kind of life we want to live and how we want our Lord Jesus to find us when he does return. **“Therefore, since all these things will be destroyed, what kind of people ought you to be, living in holiness and godliness, as you look forward to and hasten the coming of the day of God? That day will cause the heavens to be set on fire and destroyed, and the elements to melt as they burn with great heat. But according to his promise we look forward to new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, dear friends, as you look forward to these things, make every effort to be found in peace, spotless and blameless in his sight.” (3:11-14)**

We want to be found in faith in Christ on the day of his return. We have a firm position, a solid foundation in Jesus and his saving grace. Understanding the world around us, what is coming, and having a desire to be found in faith upon his return, Peter urges us, **“Therefore, dear friends, since you already know these things, be on your guard so that you do not fall from your own firm position by being led astray through the error of the wicked.” (vs. 17)** With so much opposition, the trap of so many errors that are all around us, temptations to go our own way and trust everything other than Jesus, how are we supposed to be on our guard. How do we remain on our firm position of Christ and his saving grace? Peter presents for us in the very last verse of his letter the solution - to grow. **“Instead grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory, both now and forever.” (vs. 18)** Learning is what leads to growing.

What’s the key ingredient to growing a plant? It’s a combination of things, isn’t it? It’s water, good nutritious soil, and sunlight. When plants have all of that they grow. You don’t have to tell it to grow. It just grows. Yet without one or all of those things, a plant isn’t going to grow. In fact deprive a plant of good soil, water, and sunlight, it’s going to wilt away.

As we learn more about Jesus and his grace through study of the Scriptures, we are planted in good soil. Our faith is watered. Learning what the Scriptures say and desiring to apply them to our life, we are basking in the sunlight of his grace. Like that plant, we grow. Learning leads to growing. Through God’s Word, we grow in our faith by the work of the Holy Spirit. We grow in the knowledge of our Savior, what he has done for us, and what his will is

for our life. We grow in our understanding of what that means for us as we apply it to our daily life. The more we learn, the more we grow. The more we grow, the more we remain rooted on that firm position living in God's grace and not so easily led astray.

Yet there is a temptation that we all endure, even me. We are so often tempted to think that we have learned enough. We don't need to know any more. We have all the facts. How could we be so arrogant and foolish to think we know it all and don't need to grow in any way? Yet even more, how does such thinking affect our mission as a church, a gathering of God's people? If a church has as its mission to not just make disciples but also to teach and help others to learn all that Jesus commanded us so that they grow, what effect does that desire have? How can you help people of all ages to grow by teaching and encouraging them to learn if you have no desire to keep learning and growing yourself?

Brothers and sisters in Christ, there is blessedness in growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Psalm 1 says, **"How blessed is the man who does not walk in the advice of the wicked, who does not stand on the path with sinners, and who does not sit in a meeting with mocker. But his delight is in the teaching of the Lord, and his teaching he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted beside streams of water, which yield its fruit in season, and its leaves do not wither. Everything he does prospers."** (vs.1-3) When we delight in God's Word, we are like that well-watered tree that grows in faith and produces fruits of faith in our life. We don't wither away because our faith is constantly being rooted, watered, and fed with sunlight of the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ through that Word

Learning leads to growing. When we remain committed to growing and desire to grow ourselves, as we grow, our commitment as a church to help and encourage others to learn so they grow becomes that much stronger. What results is not just a few trees growing. The church becomes a forest full of trees growing together in different ways. So how do we grow together through learning together?

Well, first of all growth primarily begins in the Christian home. In our first lesson today, we heard Moses speak about the home and how that learning and growing happens every day in some way. **"These words that I am commanding you today are to be on your heart. Teach them diligently to your children, and speak about them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as a sign on your wrists, and they will serve as symbols on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates."** (Deuteronomy 6:6-9) Yet even as you grow together in the home as a family, there still are opportunities to grow together and be better equipped for such learning that takes place in the home through the church. How has our congregation done just that for people of all ages over its history?

The programs themselves may not be exactly the same as they were in the 1870s and into the 1900s. Even now learning isn't done exactly the same way as it was at the turn of this current century. However, our congregation's commitment for people of all ages to grow together through learning remains unchanged. What opportunities have been there for adults to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ?

Perhaps the most obvious things that come to mind are Bible studies. Those studies can take on many different formats. Large groups, smaller groups, online through Zoom. They are studies that take participants through books of the Bible, on different topics, and on the foundational truths of God's Word. Yet no matter what format they take, they are all ways adults can learn and grow together formally.

What about the youth and the next generation? What opportunities have there been for them to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ? In some way we have historically offered Sunday School or at the very least an opportunity where the children not in the day school and those in the school can gather together to learn and grow together. We have offered youth confirmation classes providing a basic instruction of Christian truths that prepares them to receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Even after the youth are confirmed, we seek to support and encourage them to keep growing through their teen years in the youth group

Now, I know some of you might be thinking, “Did he forget about the school?” No, I haven’t forgotten about it, but there’s a reason I didn’t put it first. Our school may be a big part of our church’s Christian education, but really First Lutheran School has only been in existence a little less than a third of our 150 years. Yet it remains to this day a wondrous blessing for the children within those classrooms and something we hold dear. For the last 40 years our church has provided a place for children to learn and has called teachers to teach not only math, social studies, and science. It is also a place where God’s Word is taught on a daily basis in the classroom, in daily devotions, and it is weaved through every subject. In the Christ-centered environment of our school, our confirmation classes, our Sunday School, our youth group, and our Bible studies Christians have the opportunity to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ through learning together.

Growing together and helping others to grow with us is a part of this church’s history. Is there more we can do as a church? Yes. Can we improve upon what we are doing? Yes. Do we need to get back to some of what I mentioned? Yes. Yet for the last 150 years and beyond, we have helped people of all ages to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ all through learning.

However, no matter what our church does in the future, may we always have that desire to grow ourselves in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. As we grow through learning, we are better equipped to be on our guard. We aren’t so easily led astray by the errors and fall into deceptions of this world. Instead we remain standing on the firm position we have in Jesus throughout our life all while we wait for the day of Jesus’ return. Amen



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