

"How Christians Can Grow Well" 1 Peter 1:22-25 / John 1:1-5 (08/31/25)

We have been talking about faith over the past few weeks. We have also talked about how we can strengthen our faith, and we learned that for our faith to be strong, our faith should grow. Whether we are dying Christians or living Christians, a dying church or a living church, is not determined by outward appearances, but by whether we are growing.

If someone or something is growing, it means that someone or something is alive. A living being, once born into this world, continues to grow if it has life. When a child is born, that child will grow unless death comes. At some point, physical growth stops and the body begins to age, but if life continues, other areas continue to grow, like depth of thought and life experience. That is why whether we are living or dying can be seen by whether we are growing.

In today's 1 Peter Scripture, Peter said: "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God." We have received new life through the living Word of God. So, if we have been born again in God and have received new life from God, we will grow spiritually, even if we do not intend to. That is the evidence that we have received new life.

However, there is one thing to know about growth. Human naturally grows, but we need to reflect on whether we are growing well. If a child is fed and cared for only enough to survive, the child may not die, but will not grow well. Likewise, it is not only important to receive new life from God and begin the journey of growth, but also to grow well.

[Slide 1] When I first went to China, I was fifteen years old. The first

school I went to was in a national park. It was nice to wake up and study every day in such a beautiful natural environment, but at that age, when I needed to eat a lot, a national park was not the best place to live. Except for the meals provided by the school, the only place to buy food was a small store on campus. If I wanted to go to a better and bigger market or store, I had to take a shuttle to the local market downtown. And it was difficult to go on weekdays after school. So if the school meals were not enough, I had no choice but to buy bread or snacks from the school store. It was such a small store that the food was not much and of very poor quality. At the time, a small piece of bread was about ten cents, and although I was afraid of what it was made of, my hunger mattered more than my health.

Later, when I moved to Beijing, the capital city of China, for middle school, there was much more to eat. To take care of my health, I tried not to eat cheap food and bought more expensive products like milk from well-known companies. Years later, after I had returned to Korea, the melamine milk scandal broke out in China. I then realized that the expensive milk I had been drinking actually contained plastic chemicals.

There are many reasons I did not grow very tall, but I believe the biggest reason is that during those important growing years, I did not eat enough or healthy food in China. Before I went to China, my mother had cared for me with good food, and during those two years, I grew almost nine inches.

Just like a child must receive enough nutrition to grow well, our faith must also receive enough spiritual nourishment to grow well. If we are content simply with being born again, our faith will remain weak. To have a strong and healthy faith, our faith must grow well. So how can we grow in faith? How can we provide

our faith with spiritual nourishment? Just as healthy food helps the body to grow well, God's grace is what helps our faith grow well.

When Methodism came to America, it had the form and structure of a church, but the early Methodists were essentially a community that gathered to experience God's grace and to practice spiritual discipline. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, was not a theologian, but he was a good pastor who applied his theology to the church and ministry so that people could become healthy Christians. Wesley introduced several ways to receive God's grace and encouraged Methodists to practice them faithfully in life. He called these practices the Means of Grace, which include prayer, Bible study, participation in Holy Communion, fasting, helping the poor, and other ways to experience God's grace.

Just as a healthy human life requires balanced nutrition, exercise, and rest, so a healthy faith requires various Means of Grace. Each way of experiencing grace is important, but today I want to emphasize the Bible.

In today's Scripture, Peter says about God's Word: "the living and enduring word of God" and "the word of the Lord endures forever." The Apostle John begins his Gospel with, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The Word became flesh, which means our God, Jesus, came to us in a human body. So, the Word of God is unchanging, the Word of God is the most basic way to experience Christ, and it is the essential source that gives us life and helps our faith grow.

Peter did not write his letter to one specific church or person. If Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, Peter was the one who greatly contributed to spreading

the gospel to the Jewish people. So, 1 Peter is seen as a letter to Jewish Christians scattered in many places. For Jews, God's Word had the highest authority. Their roots, history, ancestors, and religious practice were all centered on God's Word, which they called the Law. Peter connected this Word to Jesus Christ, declaring that their new life came through the Word of God, that is, through Jesus Christ.

The Bible is the most basic means of experiencing God's grace. Then how should we read and study the Bible so that our faith can grow well?

First, we should actually read the Bible. When I came to the U.S. to study in seminary and began ministry, I was shocked to see how little people read the Bible. Especially in the United Methodist Church, I was surprised that the Bible is not emphasized very much. When Wesley first began his groups for spiritual discipline, he named this group the Holy Club. People mocked the members of the Holy Club by calling them Methodists. Another nickname they were given was Bible Moths, because they read the Bible so much, like Moths eating a book. The early Methodists were a community centered on the Bible. But at some point, many drifted away from this, and the Bible became more of a decoration on the shelf. Without reading the Bible, our faith cannot grow. We must read the Bible.

Second, we must read the Bible not simply to know Christianity but to know God. In the Gospels, we see many Jewish leaders—rabbis, scribes. And they knew the Scriptures better than anyone. But they did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah they had long awaited. Instead, they tried to test Jesus. They knew the Scriptures but failed to recognize Christ, because they read them as law.

If we are not careful in reading the Bible, we can also read the Bible like Jewish leaders at the time of Jesus, even as Christians. When we focus only on

right and wrong in the Bible, or read the Bible just as a guidebook for life, we may not experience the grace of God. Some say that the Bible does not record enough historical facts or is insufficient for knowing everything. But I always tell people, the Bible is a book enough to know God.

Let us imagine writing a heartfelt letter to someone you love. If that person reads the letter and understands your heart, you will be happy. But if they only analyze and criticize your letter, like saying, “Why did you use this word here?” “This expression is wrong.” You would feel hurt. But the truth is that this person has read the letter more carefully than anyone.

Our approach to Scripture can be like that. If we read the Bible only for religious knowledge, it will not be a means of grace. We must read it to know God, to understand God’s heart.

When I first met with the SPRC members of our church in June last year, I said, “If you ask the Conference to send another pastor in the future, the reason will be, ‘Our pastor pressured us too much to read the Bible.’” Of course, I love this church so much that I do not want to leave, so I will not pressure you a lot, but I do want to encourage you. Please read the Bible. During Lent, we read through the Gospels together. Starting September 1, we will begin reading Psalms. We chose Psalms for our second Bible reading challenge because they are such a good way to share our hearts with God. Over the two months from September through October, we will read two to three Psalms a day. As you read, focus on the author’s heart and emotions, your own feelings, and God’s heart. If you do not have a Bible at home, please take one from the church. Keep it near you, not on a shelf.

Statistics say that only about 13% of Americans have ever read the Bible from beginning to end. While I am here, I hope that more people in our church will be able to say they have read the Bible from beginning to end. Through this Word of God, may our faith grow well, become stronger, and stand firm. Amen.