**BELIEVE 33 – Becoming a New Person in Christ, Part 2**

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Movie – Karate Kid. Daniel LaRusso is being bullied by a gang that practiced “Cobra Kai” a vicious and unethical form of karate. One day Mr. Miyagi intervenes and saves him from 5 attackers. Daniel starts training with him to get ready for the All-Valley Karate Tournament where he can face the bullies on equal terms. Daniel’s training starts with menial chores that cause him to start to believe he is just being Mr. Miyagi’s slave. Wax On, Wax Off, as he cared for Miyagi’s classic car. Sand floor, paint fence, paint house side to side… In the midst of his frustration, the Karate Kid didn’t know Mr. Miyagi was teaching him karate defensive moves through muscle memory, not just how to wash and wax a car.

We have been on a two year journey together. We started with the Story, as we worked through the Bible in a chronological manner. This revealed to us, for some it was the first time they realized, that we are part of God’s story. Wax on. Wax off. We learned that God’s Upper Story is being worked out in and through our day to day lower story.

This past fall we began to look at the ten top beliefs of the Scriptures. After examining the top beliefs, we learned how to live those beliefs our through the top practices. Then, this spring we saw how believing those beliefs, living the practices, would develop virtues in our lives. In other words:

* **What we believe, MATTERS and what we do – MATTERS.**
* **They matter because they indicate the type of people we are becoming**
* **The goal is to ACT like, THINK like, and BE like Jesus.**

**Romans 8:29 *“From the very beginning God decided that those who came to Him - and all along He knew who would - should become like His Son...”***God wants us to become like Jesus Christ. While you’re here on earth God wants to get you ready for heaven and He wants you to grow in character. He wants you to grow spiritually. That’s what we’re going to look at today – How do I grow spiritually? More than that, how do we help each other grow. Lets put this all together….

How do we take our next BEST STEP spiritually. None of us have arrived, we all have more work to be done – that is our sanctification.

So many people are frustrated:

* They think that growing should be easy, and when it isn’t they get discouraged…they feel guilty
* They don’t see many changes in their lives.
* They have same challenges they have always had, before they believed
* Same temptations
* Tired of letting themselves and God down…

Look at what the Bible says to us. **Colossians 2:7 *“Let your roots grow down into him and draw up nourishment from him so you will grow in faith, strong and vigorous in the truth that you were taught. Let your lives overflow with thanksgiving for all that he has don****e.”* This verse promises growth if you let these things happen, so you will grow strong and vigorous.

I’ve done a lot of thinking about personal and spiritual growth over the years; my own life and other people’s lives – a lot of thinking about it. As I’ve watched over the years, I’ve seen that there’s probably about one of three experiences that we have when it comes to personal growth.

I think some people when it comes to growth; they experience what I would call a **one time experience of growth.** They have a feeling that something happened, maybe back when you were a kid or a teenager. You went to a camp once or maybe it was even at church once and something happened spiritually. But you’ve never really built on it. All it’s given you is this feeling of “I know things could be different because of what happened back then. I just don’t know how to get to it now.” Some people have that.

Many people have what I would call **time to time experiences of growth.** Every once in a while you grow a little bit but then it seems like you fall back. There’s a little bit of progress but it’s followed by long periods in between where you’re disconnected from God and other people. A lot of people have that. This is sort of the one step forward, eight steps back experience of growth. A lot of us have experienced that.

Here’s my dream. My dream is we get to the point in our lives where we have a three steps forward, two steps back experience of growth. I’m not promising perfection. There’s no such thing as that in the world. We’re human beings. We’re going to stumble. We’re going to fall sometimes. We’ve got to let God pick us up. But it is possible to have this three steps forward two steps back experience. You look at your life and you feel like “I didn’t have a perfect day here and I messed up there. But overall I’m making progress. Overall some good things are happening.” That’s the last one. That’s what God’s promise is in this verse. You can enjoy a **lifetime experience of growth** where you see God making some differences and changes.

The walk of Discipleship is a journey. I want you to see how the last two years have set you up for a lifetime of growth….if you will do your part…not automatic.

When I talk about that I want to be real clear about the picture. I’m not talking about like a rocket. It’s more like climbing a mountain. A rocket – it takes off and it just goes straight up all the time. That’s not what growth is like. Growth is more like climbing a mountain where you go up a little and then you have to go down into a little ravine. Then you go up a little bit and you go down a little bit. But overall you’re making progress. That’s how growth works. Sometimes you start up the mountain and you go down into one of these little dips. Maybe it’s an emotional dip or a relational or whatever. When that happens you feel like you’re back at the beginning, like you haven’t made any progress at all. You get discouraged. But the truth is you made a lot of progress. You just don’t *feel* it. So you have faith that God is growing you and you just keep right on growing.

When I was in Alaska, I remember climbing and climbing and still looking at the mountain left to climb. I would lose sight of the progress I had made if I didn’t occasionally look back and see how far I had come. Our spiritual growth is like that. Remember how far God has already brought you. You may say, I’m just getting started today – the fact that you are here this day means you have already taken some great spiritual steps.

**WHERE DO WE BEGIN:**

Jesus invites us to become a new person. ***“If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” 2 Corinthians 5:17***

Jesus wants to

* Heal you from your past – to put pain, shame, guilt in the rearview mirror.
* Make a difference in your present – to help you live to the fullest today
* Make you part of his future – to be with you for eternity in the new heaven nd new earth that God will restore.
* Jesus has a vision for your life and wants you to be like him.

**Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God[**[**a**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=john+14%3A1-4&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26670a)**]; believe also in me. 2My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? 3And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. 4You know the way to the place where I am going.” John 14:1-4**

Jesus is not only preparing a place for us, he is preparing us for the place. Little by little, day by day, through faith and the power of his presence, Jesus wants to help us Think, Act, Be like himself. And this is empowered by the presence of Jesus. He didn’t send us off on our own, He is with us. And Jesus invites us to be part of this life with Him.

The question is, this lifetime experience of growth, how does this happen over the long haul? I have seen as I’ve looked at my own life and other people’s lives over the years that there are **three essential ingredients** to this lifetime experience of growth.

1. **DECIDE**

If we want to grow spiritually, we have to DECIDE. Get in. Or get out. Don’t play games. This is too important, too vital, too world changing. You cannot straddle the fence. COW STRADDLING FENCE PICTURE HERE.

This is not something you can put in pencil, to erase and start over. DECIDE.

Without commitment there is no growth. The good news in this is God is committed to your growth. He’s already made that commitment. He’s already decided that he wants you to grow. He is committed to your growth so I have to be committed to the process of what God wants to do in my life.

Deuteronomy 30:20 talks about that. Circle the first word – “choose.” ***“Choose to love the Lord your God and obey him and commit yourself to him, for he is your life.”***I guess God could make the choice for us and say, “I’m going to *choose* for you to be committed to me.” But he doesn’t. He puts everything in us that we need to live out this commitment. But then we have to make the choice. He calls on us to make the choice day by day. It’s an expression of our love to him and our relationship with him. It is a choice.

If I’m going to grow in love or in anything else it starts with a commitment, a decision. If you make a decision to be ALL IN today, you need to tell somebody. DECIDE – AND HANG ON – HANG IN THERE!!!!!

1. **TRAIN.** – I didn’t say TRY – I said TRAIN. There is a HUGE difference.

The picture I get is of an Olympic athlete. An Olympic athlete may have the tools, the right type of body to be able to be this kind of athlete. But then they have to make a commitment to build on those abilities. An athlete can’t just sort of show up at the Olympics and go, “Hey! I never thought about it but I’ll give the sprint a whirl. I might win a gold medal. That might work out.” No! They practice for year after year after year developing these abilities that are God given.

The same thing is true of your spiritual growth. God has put everything into you, into me, what we need for spiritual growth when we get to know Christ. He puts his Holy Spirit in you. He gives you his people, his church, his word. He put the tools there but then I have to make a commitment to build on what God has put into my life.

In the Old Testament there are a couple books – 1 and 2 Chronicles. They’re all about the kings of Israel. But they’re also a case study in commitment. They’re a study in what begins commitment, what ends commitment, what grows commitment, what erodes commitment. You read these books and they’re a study of the life of some who made a commitment and built on that and saw incredible things happen in their life; others who failed at commitment and saw all the devastation in their life because of that. In the midst of these books is a verse about commitment. **2 Chronicles 16:9. *“For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.”***

That verse, when it was first written, was spoken by a prophet; a guy name of Hanani to a king by the name of Asa. This king had decided to go out and find a foreign ruler, a foreign power that he would depend upon to get victory in battle. So instead of depending on God he was depending on this foreign ruler. God may have wanted to use a partnership with that foreign ruler but the issue was he wasn’t relying on God. He was relying on somebody else. That’s what Asa is hearing from the prophet. You need to be fully committed. A life of full commitment. The question behind commitment is what is it that you’re relying on?

As we talk through this I know some of the honest among you might be thinking right now, “Fully committed? Me? Is that going to work? I have a hard enough time just not swearing in the presence of the pastor. If I could just get there, I’d be ok. And you’re talking about a life of full commitment? How am I going to do this? How am I going to live that kind of a life?” I’ve got some encouragement for you. This verse tells us what God is willing to do for us. **Titus 2:14 *“He* [Jesus] *gave his life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us and to make us his very own people totally committed to doing what is right.”***

See what this verse is saying? Jesus Christ gave his life to give us the power to live out this kind of commitment. If I figure I have to do it on my own, figure it out on my own personality, it’s not going to work. But Jesus gave his life, not only to forgive you but also to grow you. To help you begin to live this life of full commitment to him. The mistake we make sometimes is we think, I’ll make the full commitment on my own energy and power and then he’ll grow me from that point. No. You look to him to make the commitment in the first place. That’s why he gave his life for you so you could live out this commitment. You rely on him. You’re never going to be fully committed to him without an investment of your life in him. And commitment, when it comes to the end, it’s a choice. That’s what we’re talking about.

**What’s involved in our spiritual training? A couple of things.**

1. **Learning new truth – study God’s word. WAX ON – WAX OFF**
2. **Learn new habits**
3. **Connect to Other believers – congregation, small group.**
4. **Minister to others – Serve**
5. **Disciple someone else**

THE STORY – BELIEVE – NEW TRUTH Without truth there is no growth. You can’t grow based on a lie. God knowing that has given us the truth. He tells us the truth in his word about ourselves, about this world, about life, about the future. That’s where growth comes from. His word is the truth and that truth will grow me. But in order for that truth to grow me it’s got to get into my life.

We make the same mistake spiritually sometimes. We think just because I have a Bible in my house God’s going to feel better about me and I’m going to grow spiritually. In fact I’m even going to display the Bible, prominently out on the table. Wow! Look at that! This is going to really work great. It doesn’t work. You’ve got to get it into your life. You’ve got to get God’s truth into your life.

But there is a little known secret about this. Getting God’s truth into our lives is the source of a lot of frustration for a lot of people. It’s based on how God’s designed us and how we learn and how he’s made us. This truth is indicated in the next verse, Deuteronomy 6:6-7. Here’s how they were encouraged to learn. ***“You must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I’m giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you’re at home and when you’re away on a journey, when you’re lying down, when you’re getting up again.”***

You see? There’s multiple ways that they’re learning. You repeat them. You talk about them. You discuss them. You do it at different times and in different ways. Here’s the secret about learning God’s truth. Because I’m designed to learn in multiple ways, I’ve got to get God’s truth into my life in multiple ways. Sometimes we try to get it in, in just one way and we get frustrated with ourselves because it doesn’t seem to be sticking. It’s just not recognizing how God made us. He made us for multiple input. That’s how we learn and that’s how we grow.

One way that we learn is we hear. We take in things through the ear gate. That’s what happens in a sermon. Right now as I’m talking to you in this message you’re hearing. That’s one way of learning God’s truth. It’s a great way. It’s a necessary way. It’s a way out of which I make commitments. But if it’s the only way we end up in a lot of frustration.

How many of you have experienced this? You come in and you hear a message and you think, “Yeah! That’s it!” Maybe even right now you’re thinking, “I need this. I need to grow. I need to make a fresh commitment to growth in my life.” You’re really excited about that and you walk out the door and it all leaks out by the time you get to the parking lot. Anybody experience this? It’s those mean, nasty people in the parking lot! It’s their fault!

The truth of the matter is, statistics tell us, and you’ve heard us tell this before, that we forget about ninety-five percent of what we hear after seventy-two hours. If all I do is hear, as important as that is, if that’s all I do, it’s going to leak out.

We learn new truth through the Bible, and how to live that out through developing **new habits** of **Bible Reading, Prayer, Worship, Giving**. But we are not to do that in isolation. We need each other to discuss, to wrestle with the new truth we are learning. None of us have the wisdom to grow on our own.

In fact, here’s how powerful this is. We remember about five percent of what we hear after seventy-two hours. Studies show that we remember about ten percent of what we hear and read after seventy-two hours. So you’ve doubled your learning by hearing and reading at the same time. But we remember about fifty percent of what we hear, read and discuss after seventy-two hours. That’s why we do this. We want to get it into our lives in ways that we can live out in our lives. That’s the value of discussing it.

**Relationships.**  If I’m going to grow, a lifetime of growth, it’s going to take relationships. You can’t grow by yourself. It doesn’t work that way. You weren’t made that way. You were made for relationships. So you have to make relationships at the center of your life because that’s what you were made for. Nothing is more important in the end. Relationships are also one of the key ingredients to growth.

I know when I talk about relationships, a lot of us are pretty task oriented. That’s how you got where you are – you’re task oriented. You get things done. But I just want to warn you. You cannot make spiritual growth just one more task on your to do list. For growth you have to have relationships. And relationships aren’t just a task. They are *relationships.*

Jesus talked to us about relationships. He said nothing is more important. They asked him what are the first commandments. He said, *“Love God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength and love your neighbor as yourself.”*  Yes, God wants you to do great things in life. He wants you to accomplish wonderful things. But there’s nowhere in the Bible where he demands that you be known by a lot of people, he demands that you have a big business, he demands all the things that we make so important. It’s good to do those things but there’s no where that it’s demanded that you do those things.

What is demanded by God because he knows how he made us is that I strive for excellence in my relationship with God – *all my heart, mind, soul and strength* – and with other people – *love my neighbor as myself.* It is so easy it would be to spend my life chasing after accomplishments and even maybe reaching some of those accomplishments and be left with mediocre relationships, missing out on the very thing that God made us for.

When I talk about relationships and growth, what I’m saying is without relationships there’s no real growth. The question I’m asking you is this: what is your relational growth network? Who are the people in your life that you’re relating to where you see growth happen? Build that network. This network I’m talking about is not my idea. It’s what God says about us and how he made us. **Ephesians 4:16 *“Under his direction, the whole body is fitted together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.”*** That’s how God made us. He made us that each part helps he other part grow.

Next verse **Hebrews 10:24 *“Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.”***We spur each other on. I can’t grow just by myself. I need other people to spur me on towards the love and good deeds that God wants to happen in my life. There are growth steps in your life that you will never take, never accomplish on your own. Because God designed you for relationships so he wants you to accomplish those growth steps in relationship to other people. There are changes in your life that you’ll never make on your own, because God made you for relationships. And he wants you to make those changes in relationship to other people.

* Sins That’s where that miracle will happen of a changed life. IN RELATIONSHIP
* encouragement in your life that you’re never going to get on your own
* truth from God in your life that you’re never going to hear on your own

There are great things that God wants to do in your life and through your life that are never going to happen on their own because God made us for relationships.

What I’m saying is this: I cannot love the way God means me to love on my own. I need relationships to spur me on. I cannot do the good deeds that God means for me to do on my own. I need relationships to spur me on.

**MINISTRY** – then we learn and Jesus forms us by doing. Action. Involvement.

**DISCIPLESHIP** – My job isn’t complete until I am discipling someone else.

I’ve got to admit that when I started in the Christian life I often had a just me and Jesus way of looking at things when it came to spiritual growth. Spiritual growth means I’ll sit in my backyard and I’ll talk to God and I’ll read the Bible and God will tell me what to do and I’ll go change the world. Me and Jesus. That’s how spiritual growth works.

I’ve discovered that’s not the truth at all. It is a relationship with Jesus but it’s also a relationship with others in which I grow in that relationship with Jesus and in that relationship with others. It’s never going to happen all alone. You are made to grow in relationship to God and relationship to others.

In fact, some of the ***one anothers*** that grow us; in the New Testament there are about thirty statements where God says this is what you do for one another – things I can’t do by myself that are necessary for me to grow. A couple of them…

**Love one another**. Obviously I need to be in relationship with other people to grow in love. But a lot of us, I don’t know why it is, we think we can somehow pull this off, that I’m going to grow in relationship without ever really having to interact with people. Because people are messy. And I don’t want to be involved with people so I’m going to become a better lover but I’m going to leave people out of my life.

That’s never going to work. I know people are messy. I know people don’t always fit in with your schedule. I know that love doesn’t always work like you would want it to. A lot more patience is required than any of us want to give. But the Bible says love one another. The only way to do that is in relationship with one another.

Just in the honesty of real life I also like this other one. **Ephesians 4:2 which is *“Put up with one another.”***That’s a good verse, isn’t it? Put up with one other. That’s some of what we’ve got to do in families. That’s some of what we’ve got to do in small group. That’s some of what we’ve got to do for each other in businesses and in church. That’s part of real life because none of us are perfect. Love means that sometimes we have to put up with one another.

I know that there’s a lot of talk about, “What about this?” and, “This won’t work,” and “That won’t work.” It begins with commitment. If you’ll make the commitment, God will work out the details. It begins with commitment. If God’s put it in your heart, I could do this at my work, I could do this in my neighborhood, put your name on this right now and we’ll help you with those details. Put it in the offering plate. If you’ve got some questions right now take it out to the small group table and let us know, I’m willing to make a difference in my life and other people’s lives when it comes to love.

Before we pray in just a minute one last word of encouragement. When it comes to this issue of love, the night before Jesus died he was talking to his disciples and he knew they were going to be upset the next day and wonder what was happening. He was going to die on a cross! He wasn’t going to see them for a while. So Jesus gave them this assurance. He told them, *“Don’t let your hearts be troubled.”* Then he told them in the end I want you to be with me where I am. I love that phrase. Jesus echoes it again and again.

Did you know he said the same thing about you? He wants you to be with him where he is for all eternity. He’s looking forward to his relationship with you for all eternity. God loves you with a mad kind of love, an incredible kind of love.

When it comes to building my relationship with other people, that’s the love I build on. If I try to build my relationships with others on my relationship with others, people are going to let me down sometimes. I let myself down sometimes. Obviously other people are going to let me down sometimes. When they let me down it all crumbles. I’m so disappointed. I feel like I can’t love anybody because nobody loves me.

Somebody does love you. Jesus Christ died for you, he’s praying for you right now. He wants you to be with him where he is for all of eternity. Somebody does love you. You begin a relationship with him of love and then you build on that relationship and all the other relationships. Because that relationship, the one with him, that’s the one that will never fail you. That’s the love that will never let you go. That’s the love that will be with you for now and for all eternity. That’s God’s love for you.

**Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. 9Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. Philippians 4:8-9**

Prayer:

As you pray you might just say, Lord, you know my heart. You know how frustrated I get sometimes in this area of spiritual growth. I’d like to be so much further along than I am but I feel like I haven’t even gotten started. God, you see me. You see my frustration. You see my heart and you haven’t given up on me. Even though I’m impatient sometimes, *many times*, you haven’t given up on me. So today, based on your love for me, your truth to me, I make a fresh commitment to grow in my relationship with you. Today, based on your love and your truth, I make a new decision to balance out my growth according to your purposes, according to your truth. Lord, today I make a new decision for relationships. And for the place of relationships in my life. I don’t want to live life alone. I don’t want to live life apart from you or apart from others. So I ask you for strength that I may not feel like I always have. I ask you for strength to take the risk to love. And I ask you for the wisdom to make the daily decisions of love. God, thank you for loving us. In your name I pray. Amen.