

Introduction

The way that I began prison ministry was unusual, and not something that was carefully planned out. Our church took an ad out in the local paper. An inmate named Steve Hampton saw the advertisement and wrote a letter to us. He said his wife, Kim, and children, Ringo and Melanie, needed help, and he wanted me to come visit him in prison. Before I went, our congregation prayed for this inmate and his family for a couple of weeks. When I finally went to the prison to meet with him, the Holy Spirit moved mightily. He began crying in the presence of the Lord. As I shared the gospel with him, he was white for harvest, and quickly responded by asking Jesus to come into his life. I rejoiced with the angels in heaven over this lost sheep that had been found.

I had a brand new baby Christian that needed to be fed and nurtured. I committed myself to come the following week to meet with him. The following week, he came out to the visiting area to meet with me, but he did not come alone. He brought his bunk mate, John Cooper. So, I shared the gospel with him, and he also prayed to receive Christ. What I came to find out later was that Steve was a ring leader. He was an influencer. Nearly every week men were committing their lives to Christ. I tied to spend 70% of my time discipling these new believers, but there was lots of evangelism also taking place. They began to have Bible studies in L-4 pod, which is where I was ministering. After a couple of months, Doc Frady, the Senior Chaplain at the prison, asked me to go on staff. He said he saw great fruit in the ministry, and would love to have me on their paid staff. I agreed to go on staff, but did not take any salary from them. So, that was my start to prison ministry.

As I did weekly follow-up with Steve and John, I found that both of them were experiencing great growth. The catalysts for their growth were very different. Steve had good eyesight and could read. He spent time reading his Bible that we gave him. He looked up the passages that I shared with him, and studied them. He was like a sponge, soaking up the Scriptures and the teaching that I provided. And, I saw tremendous spiritual growth in his life.

John, on the other hand, had very poor eyesight. Drugs had taken a toll on his body, and in particular, his eyesight. To make things worse, the prison did not allow the inmates to bring their glasses into prison. The prison did allow chaplains to pass out eye ware, so one of the things our church did was buy reading glasses and give them out to the inmates. I would usually bring several different ones and let them try them out to see which ones were the clearest. But, at this point in my prison ministry, I was not bringing in reading glasses and John had no way of reading. Therefore, John had Steve or myself read to him. Despite this, John was growing in his faith. I think that John actually had a deeper relationship with the Lord than Steve, even though he was not reading His Bible every day. He listened to the Bible studies in the L-4 dormitory. He listened to the teaching I gave every week, so he was being fed. But, John did something that most people have a difficult time doing. John prayed. John prayed a lot. He spent a lot of time talking to the Lord and listening to the Lord. And the result of his prayer life and communion with the Father was tremendous spiritual growth.

When John got out of prison, his elderly parents asked him to fix their TV antenna. So, John climbed up on their roof and fixed the antenna. As he was coming down, he slipped and fell. He died shortly afterwards from internal injuries. His parents called me and asked me to do his funeral. They had seen such a change in his life, and he had attributed that change to Pastor Bill. In reality, I was just a servant that the Lord had given opportunity. It was God that was causing the growth. I preached John's funeral, and shared John's testimony and the gospel to his friends and family members.

Today, we want to look at Christian Growth. When Jesus was asked what was the great commandment, He replied that we should love the Lord with all our heart, soul, and mind. Then, He added, “the second is like it, ‘you shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these the two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.” God wants us to have a great relationship with Him, and with one another. God wants us to grow in our relationship with Him. He wants us to grow in our love for Him. But, at the same time, God wants us to grow in our relationships with one another.

(Matt 22:36-40) “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” {37} And He said to him, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ {38} This is the great and foremost commandment. {39} “The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ {40} On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

I have been told on several occasions, “I have no problem with God. It’s people that I don’t like.” John taught something a little different. He said, “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.” **If we are going to grow in our love for God, we have to grow in our love for one another.** They are not mutually exclusive. They go hand-in-hand. We must grow in our relationship with God and also in our relationships with one another.

(1 John 4:20-21) “If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. {21} And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.”

Today, we will look at some principles of growth. We will look at some principles of growth in our relationship with God, and some principles of growth in our relationship with one another. I showed you the Navigator Wheel a couple of weeks ago. The vertical spokes of the wheel pertain to our relationship with God. The horizontal spokes have to do with our relationships with one another. At the center of the wheel is Christ, the hub and foundation of our lives. When we come into a relationship with Christ, every area of our life is impacted, not just our relationship with God.



E3 Essentials for Christian Growth

1. Our relationship with God
2. Our relationships with one another.

1. Our Relationship with God

I received Christ in a hotel room in Duncan, Oklahoma. I was by myself and read a daily devotional left there by the Gideons. There was not someone there leading me through the sinner’s prayer. The man who had come by my dorm room several times my freshman year was not a friend or associate of mine at school. I was on my own, and I had no idea about growing as a Christian. After I prayed

to receive Christ, I lived the same way that I lived prior to receiving Christ. My world view was still a worldly world view. If we want to see a change in behavior, we have to see a change in our hearts. We must renew our minds before we see a change in our behavior. My heart had softened towards the Lord, but I did not know anything about growing in my relationship with Christ.

I went to summer school after my sophomore year, and the Lord put a man named Jim, from Mineola, Texas, in the dorm room next to mine. Jim was actively involved in Campus Crusade. He shared with me that I needed to start reading my Bible every day. So, I started reading Proverbs. I do not know why I started with Proverbs, but that is where I started. I began reading eight chapters a day. I would read chapters one through eight. The next day I would read chapters two through nine, and so on. I fell in love with Proverbs. I still read Proverbs every day, but only one chapter per day. I was hungry for the word.

Peter wrote that all of us are to be like newborn babies, and long for the pure milk of the word, so that we can grow in respect to salvation. I was like that newborn babe and I longed for the pure milk of the word. What I found is that my life began to change. I began to grow in respect to my salvation. My language changed, and I stopped swearing. My attitudes changed, and I began to look out for the interests of others, and not just myself. My whole life began to change when I started feeding on the pure milk of the word. **We must long for the pure milk of the word in order to grow.**

(1 Pet 2:2-3) “like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, {3} if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.”

I also found that the Word became a joy in my life. Jeremiah said, “Thy words were found and I ate them, and they became for me a joy, and the delight of my heart.” I found that the Word became the joy of my heart. I just could not get enough of it. I longed for the pure milk of the word. Healthy babies have an appetite for mom’s milk. In the same way, new born Christians should long for the pure milk of the word. **All Christians should have a longing for God’s word.** If you do not have a hunger for God’s word, we want to pray with you during the ministry time.

(Jer 15:16) “Your words were found and I ate them, and Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart; For I have been called by Your name, O LORD God of hosts.”

Much is said about having daily devotionals. I don’t think in terms of devotionals. I think in terms of spending quality time with the Lord, or fellowship. To me, I need to spend time thanking the Lord for what He has done. I need to spend time praising and worshipping the Lord for who He is. Currently, I read five psalms every morning. I know so many songs that come out of the psalms that I frequently find myself singing the psalms. Worshipping, giving thanks, and praising God are wonderful ways to become more intimate with the Lord.

Prayer and worship are a big part of fellowshiping with the Lord; they go together. In the book of Revelations we find the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders falling down before the Lamb. Each one was holding a harp and a golden bowl full of incense. The bowl of incense is the prayers of the saints. The harp obviously represents our worship with song. Then, they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are You...” The praises and prayers were being offered up together. Our time of fellowship should include prayer and praises. I go back in forth in my time with the Lord.

(Rev 5:8-9) “When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. {9} And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.”

I need to spend time praying to the Lord. I also need to spend time listening to the Lord. In Revelations 3:20, God tells us that He is standing at the door knocking. If we open the door, He will come in and dine with us. He will come have fellowship with us. Every morning, I want to invite the Lord to come fellowship with me. I say good morning to Him. I spend time worshipping Him. I love to fellowship with the Lord. **God wants to spend time fellowshipping with us.**

(Rev 3:20) “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.”

I also need to spend time reading and meditating in God’s word. Personally, I do not use daily devotionals. If you use them, and they help you in your fellowship with the Lord, great. By all means, use them. But, do not let the devotionals of others, or other religious books replace your time in God’s word. Read and meditate on God’s word, and let the Lord speak to you out of His word. His word is living and active. It brings life, and it renews your mind. When you begin to spend time in His word, your life will begin to change.

In Acts 20:32, Paul commended the pastors in Ephesus to do two things. First, he commended them to God. **We must spend time with God.** We must spend time worshipping the Lord. We must spend time in prayer. We must spend time fellowshipping with the Lord. Second, Paul commended them to the word of God’s grace. He tells them that the word of God will build them up. How many of you ever need to be built up? God is the lifter of our heads, and one of the ways that He lifts our heads is through His word of grace, the Scriptures. Be like the pastors of Ephesus. Be like your pastors at the East Mountain Vineyard. **We must spend time in the word of His grace,** which is able to build you up.

(Acts 20:32) “And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”

Paul also tells them that this word of grace will give them their inheritance. I do not know about you, but I want my inheritance. I want to know the things that God is giving to me. I do not want to miss out on my inheritance. God reveals our inheritance to us in His word. I commend you to spend time with God and to spend time in God’s word. It will build you up and give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

I also encourage you to journal. Write down the things that the Lord speaks to you. In Jeremiah 30, the Lord told him to write down all the words which the Lord spoke to him in a book. Are you writing down the words that the Lord speaks to you? Do you have a book where you keep all the things that the Lord tells you. Journaling is simply writing down the things that the Lord speaks to you, and the things that you are learning. **We should journal our time with God.**

(Jer 30:1-2) “The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, {2} Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Write all the words which I have spoken to you in a book.'”

My old Bibles are full of notes and teachings. As the Lord revealed things to me, I would write them down in the margins of my Bibles. I have kept all my old Bibles so that I can go back and review these journal entries. Now, I read my Bible on my computer, and I have been doing it for many years. My Bible software allows me to make notes about any verse. So, I still journal in my Bible. I also type in any teachings or prophetic words and save those word documents in appropriate folders on my computer. How you journal is up to you. But, I strongly encourage you to journal.

If we want to grow in our love with the Lord, we must spend time with Him. When I met Karen, I think it was love at first sight. We could not get enough of each other. We spent every spare moment together. Karen would go watch me practice on week-ends, because that is what I did with every spare moment. I hit balls and I practiced my short game. She would accompany me just so she could spend time with me. I did not have any money so we did cheap dates. We took long walks together in the neighborhoods that surrounded TCU. We went to a few Ranger games. In those days, parking was \$1.00 and tickets were \$2.00 so we could go to a game for \$5.00. Whatever budget you are on, find a way to spend quality time with your spouse. It is how you build relationally. Karen and I still try to spend as much time as possible together. We run errands together. We go on dates. We usually split meals and drink water, so our dates are relatively inexpensive. We try to go to quiet restaurants so that we can spend time talking. Our communication not one way communication. We talk and we listen. We pray for one another, and encourage one another. Spending quality time together, and communicating with one another is what you do when you are in love, and that is how you grow in your love for one another.

That is also true of our relationship with God. We need to spend time talking to Him, and we need to spend time listening to the Lord. In Revelations 3, God gives a warning and an exhortation to the church at Ephesus. He tells them that they have left their first love. Then, He tells them to repent and do the deeds you did at first. What do we do when we first fall in love? We spend time with one another, lots of time. We can't get enough of one another. We honor one another. We defer to one another. But, most of all we spend time with one another. Church, let me encourage you to spend time with God, and spend time in the word of His grace. Work on your love relationship with the Lord.

(Rev 2:4-5) “But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. {5} 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent.’”

The Song of Solomon is about the love that the bride and the bridegroom have for one another. They praise one another and are passionate for one another. The Song of Solomon teaches husbands and wives to passionately love one another, but this book is really about our love relationship with the Lord. Do you spend time worshiping the Lord for who He is? Do you spend time thanking and praising the Lord for the things that He has done and is doing? How is your love language with the Lord. Is there intimacy and passion in your relationship with the Lord? God's desire is for His bride to be intimate with Him. Our desire is to encourage and help each of you grow in your relationship with the Lord.

2. Our Relationships with One Another

At summer school, Jim also encouraged me to come to the Campus Crusade meetings on Wednesday nights. They had some worship, and then a teaching time. This was essentially what most corporate worship services are. We assemble ourselves and have a time of worship and teaching. There is something very special about our corporate services. That is why the Lord tells us in Hebrews 10:25 that we are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. Instead, we are to prioritize the assembling of ourselves together on Sunday. We need to find another time to mow our yards, do our taxes, clean our house, sleep in, or visit with family. When family members come to town, bring them to church. Let them know that our participation on Sunday morning is a priority in our lives. We are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves as is the habit of some. **We will grow when we assemble to worship and be taught from God's word.**

(Heb 10:24-25) “and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, {25} not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”

We must come prepared for our Sunday services. The Lord tells us in that same passage to consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds. We are to ponder, think, and consider how to stimulate and encourage others that we will see when we assemble. I have found that when I pray for people the Lord gives me words of encouragement for them. Church services will rise up to a different level when we begin encouraging one another. No one will want to miss a service.

In addition to praying for other people, we are encouraged to prepare for worship by being in right relationship with one another. Jesus said if we are presenting our offering and remember our brother has something against us, we are to lay down our offering and go be reconciled to one another. Afterwards, we are to come present our offering. When we begin to come to church with reconciled relationships, our praise will be a pleasing and fragrant aroma to the Lord. When the early church was of one mind, the Holy Spirit released all kinds of power to heal and to save. We must come prepared for our services.

(Matt 5:23-24) “Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, {24} leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.

At our Campus Crusade meetings, they divided up into small groups. They chose small group leaders that would follow up with the members of their small group during the week. That is what the early church did. They not only met together in the temple to worship and to receive teaching, but they also broke bread from house to house. The relationships were formed over the dinner table as they met house to house. That is a Biblical pattern for all of us to follow. We need the corporate gatherings. There is something about corporate worship that is wonderful. It is also important to be spiritually fed and equipped by apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. But, we also need our Life Groups. **We need small groups in order to develop relationships with others.** Our heart is to see every member of our church be part of a small group. Currently, we have three active small groups, and the Moriarty group is in the process of being relaunched. If you are not currently in one, please join one and become an active participant.

(Acts 2:46-47) “ Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, {47} praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

I mentioned that Karen and I spent a lot of time together, and still try to spend time together. One of the keys to growing relationally is to spend time together. You will not develop relationships at church if you only come on Sunday mornings. For the relationships to develop, you must spend time with other members. Many relationships have formed at the Men’s Bible studies on Saturday mornings. We have a breakfast at 7:30 and there is great fellowship from 7:30 until 8:00. Then, we study the word of God until 8:45. We end by praying for one another from 8:45 to 9:00. The fellowship, sharing, and praying for one another helps build relationships. The same can be said for the women’s Bible studies. Relationships are being formed and developed in these small groups. I highly encourage you to participate in the men’s and women’s studies, and in the Life Group ministries.

On the back of your bulletin this morning is a list of thirty-three “one-another” commands. We learn to flesh out these one-another commands as we develop relationally with one another. When I find out your imperfections, and you find out my imperfections, we learn how to accept one another. As we learn to accept one another, we grow and mature. Most offenses and hurts come from those that we are in relationship with. We must learn to say we are sorry, and we must learn to forgive one another. Each time we work through an offense, we grow and mature. In our small groups, we learn to care for one another, and to bear one another’s burdens.

As we show care and concern for one another, we grow in our love for one another, and we become more mature. Again, let me encourage everyone to get involved in our small group ministry. Much of our spiritual growth will come through our involvement in small groups. We need our corporate gatherings, and we also need our small group meetings. Our assembling together, whether corporately or in small groups, is something that we are not to forsake. Small group ministry is essential for us to grow in our relationships.

1. Accept one another. Rom 15:7
2. Admonish one another. Rom 15:14, Col 3:16
3. Agree with one another. 1 Cor 1:10
4. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Rom 12:10
5. Be of the same mind toward one another. Rom 12:16, Rom 15:5
6. Be hospitable to one another without complaint. 1 Pe 4:9
7. Be kind to one another. Eph 4:32
8. Be subject to one another. Eph 5:21
9. Bear one another’s burdens. Gal 6:2
10. Build up one another. Rom 14:19, 1 Thess 5:11
11. Care for one another. 1 Cor 12:25
12. Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another. 1 Pe 5:5
13. Comfort one another. 1 Thess 4:18
14. Confess your sins to one another. James 5:16
15. Encourage and build up one another. 1 Thess 5:11, Heb 3:13, Heb 10:25
16. Fellowship with one another. 1 Jn 1:7

17. Forgive one another. Eph 4:32, Col 3:13
18. Give preference to one another in honor or honor one another. Rom 12:10
19. Greet one another. 1 Pe 5:14, Rom 16:16, 1 Cor 16:20, 2 Cor 13:12
20. Live in peace with one another. 1 Thess 5:13
21. Love one another. 1 Jn 4:11, 1 Pe 1:22, 4:8, Jn 13:34-35, 15:12, 15:17, 1 Thess 3:12, 4:9
22. Pray for one another, so that you may be healed. James 5:16
23. Regard one another as more important than himself. Phil 2:3
24. Rejoice with one another. Rom 12:15
25. Restore one another in a spirit of gentleness. Gal 6:1
26. Seek that which is good for one another. 1 Thess 5:15
27. Serve one another. 1 Pe 4:10, Gal 5:13
28. Show forbearance to one another in love. Eph 4:2, Col 3:13
29. Speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Eph 5:19
30. Stimulate one another to love and good deeds. Heb 10:24
31. Teach one another. Col 3:16
32. Wait for one another. 1 Cor 11:33
33. Weep with one another. Rom 12:15

Last week Donald mentioned **one of the characteristics of maturity is unity**. I agree with that. In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he speaks to them as men of flesh and infants in Christ. He tells them that he is giving them milk to drink, and not solid food, because they are not yet able to receive it. Bottles of milk are for babies, not mature men and women. Mature men and women eat solid food. Paul has made it very clear that they are immature. Why does Paul address them as infants or immature believers? It is because they are fleshly, and there is jealousy and strife among them. There were factions in the church. Some said they were of Paul, and others said they were of Apollos. Paul said that these factions and divisions proved that they were immature.

(1 Cor 3:1-4) "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. {2} I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, {3} for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? {4} For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not mere men?"

We must learn how to work together and strive together for the unity of the faith. As we learn how to become of one mind, we will grow in our maturity. I want to go to Philippians 2 and look at some principles that Paul gave the church in Philippi to help them grow in their unity. In their church, they had two respected women who were not getting along. So, Paul wanted these women to learn to live in harmony, but he also wanted the whole church to learn these principles of unity.

(Phil 4:2-3) "I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. {3} Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life."

Let me read Philippians 2:2-7, and then we will look at a couple principles to apply.

(Phil 2:2-7) “make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. {3} Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; {4} do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. {5} Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, {6} who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, {7} but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.”

Paul encouraged the church to be of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do you hear all the oneness that he is trying to convey. He wants the Philippians to have unity. Remember that one of the signs of maturity is unity, so Paul is really wanting them to grow up, and be mature. He is also wanting them to have unity so that they will be more fruitful in their ministry.

An example becoming of one mind is found in Acts 15. There were people who were upsetting the faith of some by saying that they had to be circumcised to be saved. Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem and met with the apostles and elders about the matter. It says that they looked into the matter. Then, it says there was much debate. They were willing to investigate and discuss these things. They ironed out their differences. In verse twenty-five, James says, “it seemed good to us, having become of one mind...” **Working through issues can bring one-mindedness.** The ladies at Philippi needed to learn to work through their issues. They needed to come together and resolve their differences. That is what the apostles and elders did. That is what you and I must also do. We must learn how to work through our differences and become of one mind. Otherwise, we will not grow and become mature.

(Acts 15:6-7) The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter. {7} After there had been much debate... {24} Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with their words, unsettling your souls, {25} it seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul.”

Paul encouraged them to have the same attitude as Christ. What was the attitude of Christ? It was the attitude of humility and selflessness. **We must have the same humble attitude that Christ had.** Christ emptied Himself and took the form of a bond-servant. Jesus did not grasp for position. Even though He existed in the form of God, He laid it down. He emptied Himself and took the form of a bond-servant. Many times I have seen people serve because they have selfish ambition. They know that by serving, they can get promoted. Jesus did not have selfish ambition. He emptied Himself, and then took the form of a bond-servant. People with selfish ambition are full of themselves, and they regard leadership as something to be grasped. God is looking for a church full of people who will empty themselves and become bond-servants. A church full of people like that will have great unity. A church like that will have great power. God will use a church like this.

The other key that Paul gives is about living selflessly. Most strife is caused by selfishness. I have not seen too many fights started by someone humbly serving another person. He tells us to do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit. He tells us to regard one another as more important than ourselves. He tells us not to merely look out for our own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. **We must do nothing from selfishness.**

How do we know if we are selfish? How can we tell if we consider others more important than ourselves? When we are in a conversation with someone, do we ask them questions, or do we want to tell them about ourselves? When we are with people, do we do what they want to do, or do we insist on doing what we want to do? Do we take an interest in the things that others are interested in? Do we take an interest in their family? Do we take an interest in their job? Do we take an interest in their hobbies? Do we serve others, or do we expect others to serve us? Mark tells us that Jesus did not come to be served, but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many. At the last supper, it was Jesus that stripped down, picked up a towel, and washed the disciples feet. Jesus was continually pouring into other people. Do we continually pour ourselves into other people? Pastor Donald is going to be sharing next week about growing in our service. He will talk about spiritual gifts and how to begin using your gifts to serve others. This will help all of us to grow and mature.

(Mark 10:45) "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Christ became a bond-servant. If we have the same attitude, we will learn to serve. When we learn to lay our lives down for one another, we will grow stronger in our relationships. Our love for one another will also grow. Jesus said that there is no greater love than to lay your life down for your friend. This is what Paul tells husbands to do in Ephesians 5. He says that husbands need to love their wives like Christ, who laid down His life for the church.

(John 15:13) "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends."

(Eph 5:25) "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,"

Paul writes in Colossians 3 that **we are to put on love, because it is the perfect bond of unity**. When we humbly serve one another, we are demonstrating love, and it will bond us together. When we look out for the interests of others, and do nothing from selfishness, we are putting on love, and it will bond us together. As we grow in our humility, we will grow in our relationship with God and with others. If we do not learn humility, our growth will be stifled. Having humility is key to successful relationships and growth.

(Col 3:14) "Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity."

Conclusion (Have worship team come forward)

This morning, I mentioned that if you are not longing for the pure milk of the word, we want to pray for you. We want to pray for you to have an appetite. We want to pray for the word to become a joy in your heart. So, if you would like prayer in this area, please come forward.

If you have relationships that need mending, let us pray for you. We want to pray that God will give you the attitude of Christ, and that you will learn to do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit. We want to pray for you to learn to humbly serve others, and look out for their interests.

Introduction (Matt 22:36-40)

- If we are going to grow in our _____ for God, we have to grow in our _____ for one another. (1 John 4:20-21)

1. Our Relationship with God

- We must long for the pure milk of the _____ in order to grow. (1 Pet 2:2-3)
- All Christians should have a longing for God's _____. (Jer 15:16)
- Prayer and _____ are a big part of fellowshiping with the Lord. (Rev 5:8-9)
- God wants to spend time _____ with us. (Rev 3:20, 2:4-5)
- We must spend time with _____.
- We must spend time in the _____ of His grace. (Acts 20:32)
- We should _____ our time with God. (Jer 30:1-2)

2. Our Relationships with One Another

- We will grow when we _____ to worship and be taught from God's word. (Heb 10:24-25)
- We must come _____ for our Sunday services. (Matt 5:23-24)
- We need _____ in order to develop relationships with others. (Acts 2:46-47)
- One of the characteristics of maturity is _____. (1 Cor 3:1-4, Eph 4:11-16, Phil 4:2-3, 2:2-7)
- Working through _____ can bring one-mindedness. (Acts 15:6-7)
- We must have the same humble _____ that Christ had. (Mark 10:45, John 15:13, Eph 5:25)
- We must do nothing from _____.
- We are to put on love, because it is the perfect bond of _____. (Col 3:14)

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