

REDEEMING QUALITIES:
Learning to Share Our Mission



Grow

GROW BY EXAMPLE

In order to allow time for discussion, only portions of Hebrews 11 and 12 are included here. By taking time throughout the week to read these chapters in their entirety, your study will be enhanced.

- ◆ As you read the passages below:
 - Ask God to reveal to you the connection between faith and growth;
 - Mark any words and phrases that indicate spiritual growth;
 - Note examples of God’s grace and human response.

Hebrews 11:1-12, 17-19, 23-28

¹Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see. ²Through their faith, the people in days of old earned a good reputation.

³By faith we understand that the entire universe was formed at God’s command, that what we now see did not come from anything that can be seen.

⁴It was by faith that Abel brought a more acceptable offering to God than Cain did. Abel’s offering gave evidence that he was a righteous man, and God showed his approval of his gifts. Although Abel is long dead, he still speaks to us by his example of faith.

⁵It was by faith that Enoch was taken up to heaven without dying—“he disappeared, because God took him.” For before he was taken up, he was known as a person who pleased God. ⁶And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him.

⁷It was by faith that Noah built a large boat to save his family from the flood. He obeyed God, who warned him about things that had never happened before. By his faith Noah condemned the rest of the world, and he received the righteousness that comes by faith.

⁸It was by faith that Abraham obeyed when God called him to leave home and go to another land that God would give him as his inheritance. He went without knowing where he was going. ⁹And even when

he reached the land God promised him, he lived there by faith—for he was like a foreigner, living in tents. And so did Isaac and Jacob, who inherited the same promise. ¹⁰ Abraham was confidently looking forward to a city with eternal foundations, a city designed and built by God.

¹¹ It was by faith that even Sarah was able to have a child, though she was barren and was too old. She believed that God would keep his promise. ¹² And so a whole nation came from this one man who was as good as dead—a nation with so many people that, like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore, there is no way to count them.

¹⁷ It was by faith that Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice when God was testing him. Abraham, who had received God’s promises, was ready to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, ¹⁸ even though God had told him, “Isaac is the son through whom your descendants will be counted.”

¹⁹ Abraham reasoned that if Isaac died, God was able to bring him back to life again. And in a sense, Abraham did receive his son back from the dead.

²³ It was by faith that Moses’ parents hid him for three months when he was born. They saw that God had given them an unusual child, and they were not afraid to disobey the king’s command.

²⁴ It was by faith that Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. ²⁵ He chose to share the oppression of God’s people instead of enjoying the fleeting pleasures of sin. ²⁶ He thought it was better to suffer for the sake of Christ than to own the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to his great reward. ²⁷ It was by faith that Moses left the land of Egypt, not fearing the king’s anger. He kept right on going because he kept his eyes on the one who is invisible. ²⁸ It was by faith that Moses commanded the people of Israel to keep the Passover and to sprinkle blood on the doorposts so that the angel of death would not kill their firstborn sons.

*⁷ “... blessed are those who trust in the LORD and have made the LORD their hope and confidence. ⁸ They are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. Such trees are not bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought. Their leaves stay green, and they never stop producing fruit.”
(Jeremiah 17:7-8)*

- ◆ As you read these examples of growth in faith and think about your own growth in faith, what comes to mind?

- ✝ Following the examples in the reading above, take some time this week to write a statement about your growth in faith, and share your statement with your prayer partner.

Insert your name and an example of your spiritual growth as you write your faith statement below.

It was by faith that. . .

Continuing into Chapter 12. . .
Hebrews 12:1-2



¹Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. ²We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God’s throne.

- ◆ What weights hinder your spiritual growth? What steps will you take to strip off those weights?

- ◆ What weights hinder your spiritual growth as a congregation? How is Redeemer, Gastonia training for the endurance required to run the race God has set before you?

As we continue reading, the author of Hebrews gives us specific guidelines for living a life of faith – a life of growth – a life of response to God’s grace. . .
Hebrews 12:14-15, 25-28

¹⁴Work at living in peace with everyone, and work at living a holy life, for those who are not holy will not see the Lord. ¹⁵Look after each other so that none of you fails to receive the grace of God. Watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you, corrupting many.

²⁵Be careful that you do not refuse to listen to the One who is speaking. For if the people of Israel did not escape when they refused to listen to Moses, the earthly messenger, we will certainly not escape if we reject the One who speaks to us from heaven! ²⁶When God spoke from Mount Sinai his voice shook the earth, but now he makes another promise: “Once again I will shake not only the earth but the heavens also. ²⁷This means that all of creation will be shaken and removed, so that only unshakable things will remain.

²⁸Since we are receiving a Kingdom that is unshakable, let us be thankful and please God by worshiping him with holy fear and awe.

- ◆ Which verbs in the text above most clearly describe your spiritual growth?

- ◆ Which ones describe the growth of Redeemer, Gastonia as a congregation?

- ◆ Which verbs challenge you and call you into a new area of growth? How will you respond to that call?

- ◆ Which verbs call you as a congregation into areas of spiritual growth? What action steps will be taken to insure that your congregation is open to such growth?

GROW IN WAYS THAT MATTER

This week, we are exploring John 15:1-16; 2 Corinthians 1:3-11; and 1 John 1:5-10.

- ◆ As you read each of these passages:
 - Ask God to reveal to you the connection between fellowship, trust, confession and growth;
 - Mark any words and phrases that indicate welcome and spiritual growth;
 - Note examples of God’s grace and human response.

Read Jesus’ words in John 15:1-16:

¹“I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. ²He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn’t produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. ³You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you.

⁴Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.

⁵“Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. ⁷But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! ⁸When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father.

⁹“I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love.

¹⁰When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father’s commandments and remain in his love. ¹¹I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! ¹²This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. ¹³There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command.

¹⁵I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn’t confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me. ¹⁶You didn’t choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to

go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name.

Less than a week before His crucifixion, Jesus uses this botanic analogy to teach His disciples a truth vital to their spiritual growth.

- ◆ To prepare yourself to better understand what Jesus is teaching here, write down some things that you know must be present or must occur in order for a plant to produce fruit.

- ◆ What qualities of Christian character does Jesus name as fruit in this passage? What does He offer in order to make it possible for us to bear that fruit?

Jesus tells us that the only way to live a truly good life is to stay close to Him. The reality is that apart from Christ, our efforts at being good enough are unfruitful.

- ◆ How do you personally receive the nourishment and life offered by Christ, the Vine, to create an environment in which growth possible?

- ◆ How does your congregation encourage each other and your surrounding community to receive this nourishment and life?

7“... blessed are those who trust in the LORD and have made the LORD their hope and confidence. 8They are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. Such trees are not bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought. Their leaves stay green, and they never stop producing fruit.” (Jeremiah 17:7-8)

Now as we move into Paul's instruction to the Corinthians, it is helpful to know that the church at Corinth was weak, and Paul was deeply concerned about their growth in the faith. His words of love and exhortation in this letter offer a clear example of his commitment to the truth of God's Word. In the passage below, Paul offers counsel to the believers to grow in their faith so that they are able to stand firm. . .
2 Corinthians 1:3-11



³All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. ⁴He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us. ⁵For the more we suffer for Christ, the more God will shower us with his comfort through Christ. ⁶Even when we are weighed down with troubles, it is for your comfort and salvation! For when we ourselves are comforted, we will certainly comfort you. Then you can patiently endure the same things we suffer. ⁷We are confident that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in the comfort God gives us.

⁸We think you ought to know, dear brothers and sisters, about the trouble we went through in the province of Asia. We were crushed and overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure, and we thought we would never live through it. ⁹In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead. ¹⁰And he did rescue us from mortal danger, and he will rescue us again. We have placed our confidence in him, and he will continue to rescue us. ¹¹And you are helping us by praying for us. Then many people will give thanks because God has graciously answered so many prayers for our safety.

In order to stand firm in our faith, we need to make a decision about how we will handle difficulties, struggles, suffering, and trials. Throughout his writings, Paul shares openly with his readers about his own difficult experiences. He also shares the key to dealing with such issues.

- ◆ What is the key that he presents to the Corinthians? In what way is that key relevant to you personally?

When we “rely only on God,” we open ourselves to the ability to grow into a deep trust-relationship with the only true Source of security. As our trust and God-reliance grows, we find that it is even possible give thanks for our difficult times!

- ◆ Write down some things that get in the way, distract, and/or prevent you from following Paul’s counsel to “rely only on God” when you are faced with trials and difficulties.

- ◆ Now write down an example from your own life of a time when suffering and troubles actually provided a climate that increased and enhanced your spiritual growth.

- ◆ What does Paul say in this passage about human strength? What connection is he making between trusting God and growing spiritually?

The final reading for this week is one familiar to many. . .

1 John 1:5-10

⁵This is the message we heard from Jesus and now declare to you: God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all. ⁶So we are lying if we say we have fellowship with God but go on living in spiritual darkness; we are not practicing the truth. ⁷But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.

⁸If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. ⁹But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. ¹⁰If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts.

By definition, growth is a process; there is always another step to take. It is impossible to stand still, because simple maintenance is not growth. The fact is that we are either growing or dying.

The reading above calls us to another important aspect of growth – the importance of confession. Downplaying sin dishonors Jesus' sacrifice, choosing a self-righteous attempt to earn God's grace over simply receiving it. Most Lutheran congregations practice corporate confession as a part of their liturgy every Sunday. Sadly, we sometimes recite the words on auto-pilot, thus missing this opportunity to grow. Other times we feel as if recognizing our sin and confessing it disqualifies us from God's grace, when in reality, it is the only thing that qualifies us!

- ◆ In light of what you have learned so far about spiritual growth, how do you see the practice of confession fostering that growth?

- ◆ Is there anything you can give up that would allow you to open yourself more fully to receive God's grace, thus increasing the level of integrity with which you offer your confession?

- ◆ How will you use the practice of confession to help you mature in your spiritual walk?



- ◆ As you look back over this week's readings, what messages do you hear God teaching about growing in ways that matter? Write down specific things that these passages indicate as significant areas of growth.

- ✝ Ask God to guide and direct your congregation as you carry out the growth portion of your mission. Throughout this week, write down what God brings into your mind and your heart as you pray. Share your insight with your prayer partner.

GROW TO MATURITY

Our Scripture passages this week provide us with examples of (and instruction for) spiritual maturity.

- ◆ As you read each of the passages this week:
 - Ask God to reveal to you the meaning of spiritual maturity;
 - Mark any words and phrases that indicate spiritual maturity and a connection between growth and welcome;
 - Note examples of God's grace and human response.

We begin this week with 1 Peter 2:2-3. . .

²Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation. Cry out for this nourishment, ³now that you have had a taste of the Lord's kindness.

The need for milk is instinctual in a newborn baby, signaling the desire for nourishment that will lead to growth. As we begin to see our need for God's Word and we begin to find nourishment in Christ, our spiritual appetite increases, and we begin to mature. We learned last week that we are always either growing or dying, so this might be a good time to take an honest look at our desire for growth.

- ◆ What "growing pains" have you experienced and/or do you anticipate as you reflect on maturing spiritually?

- ◆ Write down signs of growth that you have noticed since you began this study.

- ◆ What is your hope as you think about maturing in the faith?

- ◆ Write down some of the spiritual cravings you experience.

In Week 4, we focused on the 11th and 12th chapters of the book of Hebrews. This week, we look at a preface to those faith examples. . .

Hebrews 6:1-3

¹ So let us stop going over the basic teachings about Christ again and again. Let us go on instead and become mature in our understanding. Surely we don't need to start again with the fundamental importance of repenting from evil deeds and placing our faith in God. ² You don't need further instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. ³ And so, God willing, we will move forward to further understanding.

- ◆ How is God speaking to you personally, and as a congregation, in this passage?

Last week, we read the beginning of Paul's counsel to the church in Corinth regarding their spiritual growth. Now let's read the counsel he gives as he closes that letter. . .

2 Corinthians 13:5, 11

⁵ Examine yourselves to see if your faith is genuine. Test yourselves. Surely you know that Jesus Christ is among you; if not, you have failed the test of genuine faith.

¹¹ Dear brothers and sisters, I close my letter with these last words: Be joyful. Grow to maturity. Encourage each other. Live in harmony and peace. Then the God of love and peace will be with you.

⁷ "... blessed are those who trust in the LORD and have made the LORD their hope and confidence. ⁸ They are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. Such trees are not bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought. Their leaves stay green, and they never stop producing fruit." (Jeremiah 17:7-8)

- ◆ What challenges you personally, and your congregation, as you read Paul’s counsel? How do you plan to meet those challenges?

Throughout his writings, we see the importance Paul places on spiritual growth. Refusing to allow imprisonment to take his focus, he reflects spiritual maturity to the Philippian church – and gives us a glimpse of WELCOME blossoming into GROWTH. . .

Philippians 4:4-13

⁴ Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! ⁵ Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon.

⁶ Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. ⁷ Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

⁸ And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.

⁹ Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.

¹⁰ How I praise the Lord that you are concerned about me again. I know you have always been concerned for me, but you didn’t have the chance to help me. ¹¹ Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. ¹² I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. ¹³ For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.

- ◆ What characteristics of spiritual maturity are evident to you as you read Paul’s counsel to the Philippian believers?



- ◆ How does this passage highlight the connection between welcoming relationship and growth?

- ◆ What evidence do you see of grace and response in this passage?

- ◆ In what ways is Paul's counsel to the Philippian church relevant to The Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Gastonia today?

As we conclude this section of our study, we read Paul's words to yet another congregation. Imprisoned in Rome (possibly on house arrest at this time), Paul wrote this letter to the church in Ephesus approximately a year before writing his letter to the Philippians.

Midway through this letter, after proclaiming to the congregation that the Gentiles and Jews were part of the same Body, both sharing equally in the riches inherited by God's children, Paul prays for their spiritual growth. . .

Ephesians 3:14-20

¹⁴When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, ¹⁵the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. ¹⁶I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. ¹⁷Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. ¹⁸And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep

his love is. ¹⁹ May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.

²⁰ Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. ²¹ Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen.

- ◆ Try to imagine Paul's voice ringing through the barriers of time and space, lifting this prayer for you and for Redeemer, Gastonia. What happens in your mind and heart if you allow that possibility to become a reality?

- ◆ If you were to lift this prayer to God for members of your family, how would you expect God to answer your prayer? Would you be open to surprising answers – things you have not even imagined? Why or why not?

- ◆ If you, the people of Redeemer, Gastonia, were to offer this prayer for each other, how would you expect God to answer your prayer? Are you ready for His answer, or do you already have your own?

- ✚ As we wrap up the GROW section of this study, meet with your prayer partner this week to intentionally give thanks to God for the nourishment He provides for you personally and for the congregation of Redeemer, Gastonia.

- ◆ As you think about growing by example, growing in ways that matter, and growing to maturity, write down specific ways your concept of GROWTH has changed over the past six weeks.

- ◆ Now write down the connection you are seeing between WELCOME and GROWTH – and how that connection is significant for your congregation.

It is my prayer that your craving for the nourishment that Christ offers continues to increase as your growth leads you to fulfill the mission He has given you. May you be open to God's mighty power at work within you, accomplishing more than human minds can think or hearts can imagine as you make every plan and action a genuine response to God's grace.

²⁰ Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.

²¹ Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen.

⁷ "... blessed are those who trust in the LORD and have made the LORD their hope and confidence. ⁸ They are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. Such trees are not bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought. Their leaves stay green, and they never stop producing fruit." (Jeremiah 17:7-8)