

Grow

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Preacher: Matthew Capone

[0 : 0 0] and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you today. A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following after Jesus as one community, and we've become convinced as we follow after Jesus that there's no one so good, they don't need His grace, and no one so bad they can't have it.

And so it's for that reason that we return week after week to see what God has to say to us in His Word, because we believe that He has something to say to everyone. He has something to say to people who've been Christians their entire lives.

He has something to say to people who've been Christians for a very short amount of time, and He has something to say to people who would not consider themselves Christians, people who have doubts or questions or objections to Christianity.

And so we're continuing altogether our study in the book of 2 Peter, and in fact, we are finishing it today. This is our last Sunday in 2 Peter. Next week, we are going to begin a study in the book of Daniel.

So I'll just say as a sidebar, if you want to prepare for that, read Daniel chapter 1. It's a fun story, and you'll be ahead for next week. But you'll remember, and I'll tell you now for the last time, that 2 Peter is a letter.

[1 : 1 4] It's a letter written by a man named Peter to a church in the 60s AD somewhere in the Roman Empire. And he writes this letter with one hope, one goal.

He wants these people to grow. And he wants them to grow in two ways. He wants them to grow in grace, and he wants them to grow in knowledge. And I've been telling you we know this because he tells us at the very beginning, chapter 1, verse 2, he says he wants grace and peace to be multiplied to them through knowledge.

And he also tells them at the very end, which is where we are now. He gives them this command in the last verse that they would grow. It's an imperative, the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Remember that we are at the end of the book, and Peter is giving us his final words. Last week, he gave us a negative command. Remember, don't be carried away. This week, he is giving us the positive.

He wants us to grow. And so we're going to take sort of a 40,000 feet look at what we've seen over the last many months now. We started this in the fall.

[2 : 1 7] I think we started in September. We're going to look back over everything that we've done, and we're going to give a summary here of this final command, what it means for us to grow. If you feel like this might be a little bit of repetition, some of it will be.

And when it comes to the Bible, repetition is not a bug. It's a feature. Remember, earlier in the letter, in fact, it was in chapter 1.

I think it was verses 12 through 15. Peter says, I want to stir you up by way of reminder. And then he mentions later in the letter as well the importance of reminding.

And so it's with that that we come here looking at what it is, what it means for us to hear God's word that we grow. That we grow in grace and we grow in knowledge.

And so I invite you to turn with me to 2 Peter 3, verse 18. You can turn in the back of your worship guide. Of course, you can open it up on your Bible or your phone. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's word.

[3 : 16] And God tells us that his word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. In other words, he has not left us to stumble alone in the dark, but instead he's given us his word that we would know the way to go.

And so it's for that reason that we read now, verse 18. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity.

Amen. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven, we thank you that you've given us this letter.

And we thank you for everything that you have taught us over these months about knowledge and grace. You've taught us that you're the source of it. You've taught us what it means to grow in it.

You've taught us the dangers of false teaching. And the encouragement that we take from the fact that you are coming again. We ask as we end this letter that you would send your spirit again to help us.

[4 : 20] That we would be able to see and believe and understand and know everything that you've written in your word. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. As all of us are aware, there's a lot of strange things that happened in 2020.

So much so that it's sort of become a joke. And of course now people are making jokes about 2021 and all the terrible things that have happened so far. There's one thing that's strange that happened in 2020 though that you might have missed in the midst of everything else going on.

And it was this, in the fall, sales of chess boards went through the roof. eBay reported a 215% increase in the sales of chess boards and chess accessories.

Chess sets in general went up by 125%. And one game company called Goliath Games reported that they had seen sales go up by 1,000%. Now if you're wondering why, you might think it's because everyone was stuck at home with the coronavirus.

Problem is it didn't happen until the fall that this sales spike increased. If you follow with pop culture, you know why this happened, which is that the show, Queen's Gambit, came out.

[5 : 38] And for a while, it was one of the top shows on Netflix. And it tells the story of Beth Harmon, who's this child prodigy playing chess, but she's also an orphan. And so we follow both her success and also her addictions as she pursues this world championship in chess.

She's a child prodigy and she goes all the way from being a novice. I won't ruin the end for you, but she starts out as a novice. And then she works her way through the championships. And so this is the reason, right, that everyone's buying these chess sets.

They're excited about chess. Now it is, of course, about the play and people love watching her play these games. It's exciting. There's also, however, a sub-theme in the movie that you might have missed.

And that is the theme of Beth's books. Episode 1. Beth is being taught by Mr. Scheibel, the teacher, how to play chess. He gives her a book on chess strategy, which she then studies at night.

Okay, episode 2. We see her steal a chess magazine. Because she needs, she wants as much knowledge about chess as she can get. She goes to the library.

[6 : 44] This is after she's been adopted out of the orphanage. She goes to the library and checks out books on chess. Episode 5. Her friend Harry Beltick shows up to her house to help her train to fight the Russians.

What does he bring with him? Big box of books. And so they go through them together to figure out what she's read and what she hasn't. Episode 7.

Her friend Jolene returns. Who she has not seen in years from the orphanage. What does she bring with her? The chess book that she stole from Beth so many years ago.

And so there's two things going on. If you've been with us in 2 Peter, you know exactly where I'm headed with this. She's growing in her skill, right, in playing chess. It's wonderful to watch her play chess and defeat so many people who are more experienced than her, older than her.

And of course there's this male-female dynamic, right? She's beating these male champions as this woman in the world of chess. And what is she doing as she's growing in this skill, this ability?

[7 : 46] Well, she's also growing in knowledge. She takes her learning so seriously. She's studying these books. She's replaying games.

And the scene where Harry brings her the box of books, he keeps handing them to her, right? And she just says, you know, I've read that one, I've read that one. He finally hands her one. He says, okay, yeah, you've read this one, right? She says, well, no, but I already have a copy of it.

She is reading. She has to get her knowledge to support her skill. It's not one or the other, but they both go together. And that's what we've seen through this entire letter.

It's what we see in this last verse, that this growth is two things that are constantly working with and on one another. Yes, her skill is great, and it's accompanied by knowledge.

These things feed off of each other. And if you're wondering why this is such a great emphasis for me and us in this series, first of all, of course, it's because this is the theme of the book. We are here in God's word.

[8 : 43] This is what it's reinforcing for us over and over again. We've been going back and forth between grace and knowledge, grace and knowledge. The other reason that we're hammering this home is because it is a failure, not a failure, but often an error of the church to fall into one or the other.

So in our types of churches, in Reformed churches, we often fall into people who value knowledge, but we forget about growing in grace. And so this is a way that Satan likes to lull people to sleep.

It's one of his strategies. He convinces people that they're growing spiritually because they know more than they knew before. And yet it's worth little if it doesn't lead to growth in grace.

In many American evangelical churches, the opposite is true. People are passionate about growing in grace. They have very little knowledge, though. And so they're tossed about by all kinds of ideas and philosophies that are actually antithetical to Christianity.

They're taken in, as we talked about the last few weeks, by false teachers. And so this theme that we see for Beth here and in this letter is critical. We have to know both knowledge and grow in grace.

[9 : 52] This command, then, is what we're going to look at this morning, both in turn. We're going to look first at growth in knowledge, then at growth in grace. I know I'm reversing the order from the verse here, but I'm doing that because there's a logic to it.

Remember in verse 2 of chapter 1, we have grace and peace multiplied to us through knowledge. Since knowledge is our instrument here, we're going to begin with this.

Remember that this lack of knowledge is what could be destructive to the people in this letter. We saw the theme introduced in growth in chapter 1, and then in chapter 2, we immediately headed into our struggle with the false teachers.

False teachers are teaching two things that are very destructive. One, they're denying the reality that Jesus is coming again. And we saw that that knowledge hurt these people's growth in grace.

If they believed it, they would believe then that their actions didn't matter. These false teachers are promoting especially sexual immorality. They're also promoting things like greed and licentiousness.

[10 : 54] And so it's a lack of knowledge that leads these people to be led astray, to be taken away. We've talked about that danger over and over again, and so I want to focus now simply on how we grow.

If we're looking back about all those problems, we see the importance and the necessity of growing in knowledge. Remember I gave you the thought experiment last week of two types of growth, right?

We can grow fat or we can grow strong. I told you if I decided that I wanted to gain 10 pounds of fat, I could do it relatively easily. I have the strategy already figured out.

I think I could accomplish it in a very short amount of time. I want you to ask and think about the other side of that, though, this morning. What if I decided I wanted to grow not 10 pounds of fat, but I wanted to grow 10 pounds of muscle?

What would I need to do to grow? Well, I'd have to have a lot of different strategies, right? It is not easy to grow 10 pounds of muscle.

[11 : 57] And so one of my strategies would be this. If I want to get strong, I would need to make sure day after day, week after week, month after month, I am eating right. I'm eating a good diet.

I need to make sure I have high protein, right, because that's the building block of muscle. Of course, I can't forget the vitamins and minerals. I need to make sure I'm getting enough high-quality vegetables and fruits and all these other things that I need to keep strong.

Maybe I'm getting some kind of oil to help with my joints. But there's a commitment. There's a strategy that's needed for my body to have everything that it needs to support this growth. We're consistently eating a good diet.

If we want to grow as Christians, how much more is that true of us? We must have a strong, good, clear, consistent diet of knowledge.

We talked about last week, part of the way we're not being carried away is by looking at the signs, looking at the kind of church, the kind of teaching that we want to have.

[12 : 59] The same is true, again, if we want to grow in a positive sense. When the Apostle Paul leaves the Ephesian church in the book of Acts, he tells them that he taught them the entire counsel of God.

He says, I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. It is they need all of the things that God gives us in the Bible to grow. If you want to grow strong, right, you're not just eating protein.

You're also making sure you get the source of all the other elements that you need. The same is true for us as Christians. We need God's whole counsel. We don't just need pieces and parts of the Bible.

We need everything coming together, brought in. Remember, we talked in chapter 1, verses 3 and 4, about the precious and very great promises. And I told you then, also speaking about strength, that if you lift big, you've got to eat big.

And if you run far, you've got to eat right. The same is true again. And so there's been this special focus in this letter on two types of knowledge.

[14 : 05] We've looked at knowledge about Jesus' second coming. We've looked especially about knowledge about sexual integrity. There are all sorts of other kinds of knowledge that we need, though, to stand strong in our time.

In our culture right now, in America, in the American church, and in the world at large, there's, of course, many other topics that we need to know the whole counsel of God about. We need to know about suffering.

There's all kinds of places in the church now where you're going to be taught that if you're a Christian, you're not going to experience suffering. You're going to be able to avoid it. And even if you're not being taught that, if you're not being taught how to prepare and stand up under suffering, you're not going to be strong, right, when the challenges come.

We also need to know how to stand strong against tribalistic thinking. It's true both in the world and in the church that we feel like we have to pick different teams to play for.

And yet the Bible can help protect us from that sort of tribalism. That's knowledge that we need to grow in. Knowledge also that we need to grow in is knowledge about marriage.

[15 : 11] We live in a culture and also in the church where we're told that marriage is about us and our self-fulfillment. Well, imagine what happens when that's what we believe.

Look at the marriages in the church in general and in our world. That's what happens when you believe it's about self-fulfillment. It's not about something greater, a mission that God has for us to accomplish together.

We need to know. We need to have a theology of the body. That's part of what we talked about, I believe it was in chapter 2. People are being deceived, right?

They don't understand what God teaches us about how sacred our bodies are. It's not that Christians think too little. It's not that the world thinks too much of the body.

It's that it thinks too little. Our bodies are more beautiful and glorious than the world knows. And so we treat them with greater care and respect and integrity.

[16 : 10] These are all areas of knowledge that are under attack. Things that we need to know about the entire counsel of God. And so what do we do if we want to grow? We're consistently eating a good diet.

We're consistently making sure what we're receiving and putting into our minds, the knowledge that we're growing in, is whole and complete. And so I'm going to give you a few practical suggestions. How can we have a strong spiritual diet?

First, as I mentioned last week, we come to church. Now you might say, of course you're going to say that you're a pastor. Well, I don't believe you should come to church because I'm a pastor.

I'm a pastor because I believe you should come to church. Even more than that, this is, as I mentioned last week, the logic of strength. Strength. Repetition is what equals strength. You don't get strong going to the gym once a month.

You get strong week after week, consistency after consistency. It is not because we're legalists. It's because we're people who know what we need.

[17 : 17] We are more feeble and frail than we realize. We need, every week as I tell you, when I give the benediction, this is a word that's true in a world filled with words that are not true.

How are you going to stand in a world filled with words that are not true if you're not regularly hearing words that are true? If we're going to grow, we have to show up.

And so that's simple. Come to church. Hear the word preached. Hear it when it's exciting. Hear it when it's something you've heard before. Second, when you are picking a church, choose a church with a good diet.

Now, you might think I've already picked a church. Some of you are going to move. Some of you are going to grow up and leave your parents' house, and you're going to go to college, and you're going to have the choice of which church you go to.

Choose a church that has a good diet. Some of you are going to still be at this church in five years. Remember our thought experiment from last week.

[18 : 24] Hold this church accountable to having a good diet. There's a reason, as I mentioned last week, that we preach through books of the Bible verse by verse.

Who knows which of us will be here in five years? I don't know who wants to think about it. Let's just say 2026. In 2022, three of you move away to other parts of the country.

In 2024, I'm in a freak car accident. I'm not here anymore. And it turns out there's only 30% of us here. Remember right now, hold this church true and faithful to a good diet from God's word.

Stay with a church that gives you a good diet. Pick a church that has a good diet. If you're at a church and magically hard passages are just skipped, you should be asking some questions.

There's nothing wrong with topical preaching. It's great. We might do a topical series at some point, and we want our overall diet to be one of preaching through entire books of the Bible.

[19 : 34] If that's not true, ask some questions. Pick a church with a better diet. Second, if we want to grow in knowledge, read the Bible on your own.

It doesn't have to be something intense. You don't have to read three chapters every day. You can. You're more than welcome to. Pick something. Stick with it.

When you skip a day, you miss a day, don't beat yourself up. Pick it back up. If you need some suggestions, some encouragement, we can talk later. Now, sometimes Christians can turn this into a legalism.

They can feel beat up by it. They feel like, well, I'm not doing enough. I could always be doing more. I could always be reading more or studying more. What's the most? When have I done enough?

Sometimes people can get caught up into this sort of legalism about growing in knowledge, about studying the Bible. And this is where I think food's an incredibly helpful metaphor. You know you need to eat food to live.

[20 : 39] You also need to live. You can't spend your whole day eating. That's not healthy. At some point, you actually need to exercise. We're going to talk about that later, growth in faith or growth in grace, not just growth in knowledge.

There's a point where you've eaten enough for the day. There's a point where we've studied enough, right, and we go out and live our lives. So we don't need to be caught up into some kind of legalism, always beating ourselves up that we've never done enough.

Just ask yourself, am I feeding on God's word? What can I do to do that on a regular, consistent basis? Finally, gather with other believers.

This is a group project that we have. Growing in knowledge is not something we do alone. You could go off on this, but if you've watched Queen's Gambit, you know that Beth's greatest success comes when she's working with other chess players.

But as the series goes on, she's collaborating more and more. She needs other people with her. She needs other people helping her. Studying and growing in knowledge, it's not a solo sport.

[21 : 49] Again, we don't have to become legalistic about this. Find a way that you can connect with other Christians somewhere outside of church, and you're studying the word together. That's how we grow.

That's how we grow in knowledge. We have a good diet. We have a consistent diet. And there is a point at which we've eaten enough, right? We know as humans we need to eat every day. There's only so much we can eat every day.

Same is true with God's word, okay? Consistently, little by little, right? If you're someone who's tried to lose weight or gain strength, you know it doesn't happen overnight. I can get fat overnight if I want to.

I can't get strong overnight. But I show up, right, week after week after week. As we've mentioned before, though, growth in knowledge is not enough.

In fact, if you remember from chapter 2, verses 20 and 21, growth in knowledge can actually be dangerous. It is dangerous to know something that we're not going to act on because we're culpable for it.

[22 : 55] We are responsible for what we know. Okay, I spent a whole sermon, verses 20 and 21 on that. And you know there's a kind of person, right? There's the type of person who laments and complains about the lack of biblical literacy in our culture and in the church.

They might say something like this. You know, most people can't even tell you which gospel the Sermon on the Mount is in. And as that person complains about no one knowing where the Sermon on the Mount is in, their life is filled with the kind of anger that Jesus warns about in the Sermon on the Mount.

Okay, there's a danger to just having knowledge. There's a pride that can come with it. There's another type of person, right? This is the type of person who is diligent and proud. They are proud of the fact that they read their Bible and they pray every day.

And they can't understand why no one else is as disciplined as they are. It's not that hard, right? Just get on the train with me. And all that prayer and reading somehow never leads them to love their family and their community more.

Christianity for them is all about this activity. It's about ritual. And so there's a danger to knowledge. Knowledge by itself can be a way of covering up other things.

[24 : 19] And so there's a tremendous wisdom here to the way Peter puts this book together, that he has knowledge and grace together. It's not one or the other, but both and. And so remember, I asked you this question, what would you do if you wanted to gain 10 pounds of muscle?

Well, yeah, you definitely need to be eating right. That's not the end of the story though, right? What's gonna happen if you just eat right? Not a lot. If you wanna gain 10 pounds of muscle, if you wanna grow, as Peter commands us here, if we wanna grow in knowledge and in grace, you are also working out.

You're also going to the gym, right? You're also lifting if you wanna gain, if you wanna grow, if you wanna become strong. It's not just that it's the right diet, but the right exercise, right?

It is amazing. It's incredible how holy you can be when you're reading the Bible alone by yourself. It's amazing how little you can sin when you're sitting and there's no one else around and you're just studying the word.

So holy, so sanctified. Play it out in the real world. I have a friend who explains the church and what we do is sort of like a heart that deals with the blood and the heart pulls all the blood in, right?

[25 : 39] And then it sends it out. We get pulled in together in worship on Sunday and then we're sent out into the world. The blood has a job to do. It's going out to take care of the rest of the body.

I mean, imagine for a second, like the lungs, right? The lungs are supposed to give oxygen to your blood so that the oxygen can go to all the other cells. But what if your blood just decided to like hang out in the lungs? We just like it in the lungs.

There's so much oxygen. It's just so good here. There's so much rich oxygen. What's going to happen to the rest of the body? It's going to die. That's the relationship between knowledge and grace.

We come in, we get the oxygen and the knowledge we need, then we go out into the world. That's part of how we know, by the way, you know you can only eat so much per day, partially because you have all these other things to do, right?

We can only take in so much knowledge because we have to live out the Christian life. There's an irony, right? If you're reading, you're studying Ephesians 5 so much about marriage that you don't have a chance to talk to your spouse.

[26 : 43] Right? Knowledge and grace, they go together. And so we have, the Bible tells us what this grace looks like. We're told the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians chapter 5. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Okay, so question for you. Where exactly do you figure out whether you have love or not? As you work with other people. How do you figure out whether you have patience or not?

As you're pursuing things, as you're obeying God with other people, ministering to other people. Okay, how do you know whether you have kindness or goodness? Do you test that out alone by yourself at your kitchen table?

No, your kindness and your goodness is worked out, right? In the real world. And so there's a reason that I tell you when we begin the sermon that we're following Jesus together as one community.

Because that's how you follow Jesus. That's how you put your faith to work. That's how you grow, not just in knowledge, but in grace. You're actually growing in the fruits of the Spirit as you pursue everything that God has for us in His Word, on mission, with other people.

[27 : 56] People sometimes who you don't like. And then you can learn about patience, joy, love, kindness, goodness, self-control. You're in these situations, right?

The person growing strong is in the gym. We as Christians are in all the situations that God's placed us in. We grow in strength when we have to ask the question, what do I do when my daughter comes to me and tells me she's transgender?

How do I balance truth and love in that situation? How do I discern and separate my political beliefs from what Jesus actually teaches? How do I avoid getting sucked into tribalism?

I have a team. Whatever that team says is right. Whatever the other team says is always wrong. That's a place to grow in grace. How do I maintain hope despite the craziness that's going on in our world?

How do I have that joy, right, that the fruit of the Spirit talks about? How do I go to work? How do I live out God's mission with other people? These are all opportunities for me to not just grow in knowledge, not just be eating the good food, but to be growing in grace, to be putting it to work, to be working out our faith.

[29 : 13] And so there's another question, too, as we talk about growing not just in knowledge, but in grace, growing in the fruits of the Spirit. There's a place, we've talked about this a little bit in 2 Peter, of self-examination.

You ask yourself, this is part of the process, am I growing? And, just like gaining muscle, probably not helpful, right, to look at the scale one day and then the next.

Am I growing this last year, these last two years? Is God working more love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control into my life?

We're working out. We're examining ourselves. We're asking. And then we're going back with those other people that we're following Jesus together with, right? And we're continuing to grow together.

Growing in grace. We're growing in knowledge. The trajectory of the story in Queen's Gambit is that Beth is aiming for when she's finally going to face the Russians.

[30 : 22] And she has to face the greatest of all the Russians, Borgov, and that's what the series is aiming towards at the very end, her face-off with this man. And as this tension is building, she's moving her way through competitions in the United States with her eyes on international opportunities.

When she first faces off against the Russians, we have this one scene where we get to listen in on them talking about Beth. And they're working together. They're trying to figure out how to defeat her, how they're going to play against her.

And one of them says to the other, she's not like the other players. She's actually like us because she can't lose. We as Russians are not allowed to lose.

She, unlike all the other American players, is also not allowed to lose because she's an orphan. In other words, Beth, as we see through the entire series, carries this incredible weight from the fact that her father has abandoned her and her mother has died.

She carries this incredible weight from her experiences with the troubled family that adopts her. And so as she's growing in knowledge, as she's growing in skill, it's motivated not by a positive, but by a negative.

[31 : 43] She carries this heavy burden. Her animating power here is her fear and her insecurity, her woundedness, her abandonment. Brothers and sisters, when we pursue knowledge and grace, we do not do it from a negative.

We do it from a positive. We are not doing it out of fear and insecurity, woundedness and an abandonment. Instead, Jesus tells us this in John chapter 14.

I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you. Beth has to do it all by herself.

We do not. We grow in grace and knowledge because we are not orphans. Jesus is the one at work in our lives.

Remember, we saw this in chapter one. We were told, verse one, faith comes through Christ's righteousness, not ours. It's not something that we earn. Verse three, why is knowledge so important?

[32 : 51] Chapter one, verse three, because that's where divine power is. It's not that knowledge by itself is powerful, but that God works through it. Beth has to do it all herself.

We do not. Beth is an orphan. We are not. Jesus tells us also, John chapter 15. We've looked at this before as well.

I am the vine. You are the branches. Whoever abides in me, I in him. He it is that bears much fruit. For apart from me, you can do nothing. Remember, Beth's animating power is fear and insecurity.

Our animating power is God at work in us, giving us new life. And so we grow not by ourselves. We're pulling ourselves up by the bootstraps. We grow because he's the one at work.

[33 : 58] It tells us, to him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Beth is fighting that she could finally have some glory. An orphan who's been abandoned multiple times.

And it's the day when she's gonna face Borgoth and find out if she has enough, if she has what it takes to defeat this man. And she doesn't know, right?

We look forward to the day when Jesus is coming back. Beth doesn't know the outcome. We do. When she plays her final game, the outcome is unknown.

We grow in grace and in knowledge as we feed on God's word. We grow in grace and knowledge as we follow God's command and his mission with other Christians, other believers together.

And so we can, verse 18, grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity.

[36 : 25] We thank you that you have not left us as orphans, but you are coming back. We ask that you'd give us the hope that comes from looking forward to that day and it would be not a negative motivation, but a positive motivation that we would look with joy towards your return and it would propel us towards growth now together.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.