

Growing by *Encountering God*

Jonathan Rue

Luke 5:1-11

Growing in God Series

09.20.09

We're starting a new series tonight called Growing in God. This is our vision series where we look ahead to where God is leading us as a community this year. So we'll spend the next three weeks looking ahead at how we can be growing together in God this year. If you have just joined us here at Joshua House, you've picked the perfect time to come!

All living things grow.

SLIDE:
All living things grow

To be growing is to be in the natural state that we were meant to be as a living organism. You don't try to make things grow, all living things just...grow—provided the conditions are right.

Animals grow, biological organisms grow, plants and vegetables and trees grow. Insects grow. Mold grows. Bacteria grow. And people grow. We grow physically, we grow emotionally, we grow socially and mentally and we grow *spiritually*. And it's our spiritual growth that we're going to focus on in this series. Our spiritual lives should be growing.

SLIDE:
Our spiritual lives should be growing

This is how God designed us and this is how God wants us to live, as people that are growing spiritually. Well, what does that mean? What does it mean to grow spiritually?

Well, spiritual growth simply means that we are growing closer in relationship with God and becoming more like Jesus. So it isn't just that we might know more Bible verses by heart or have a more intelligent knowledge of right doctrine, but that we would be more kind, loving, and gracious people when things don't go our way. That we would be more selfless and giving toward those that are in need. That we would judge less and help more. That we would be faithfully involved in deep friendship, not live isolated and insulated lives away from people that might hurt us.

Unfortunately for many people that follow Jesus, that is not what they being a Christian is all about. They think that spiritual growth is only what happens when we put our faith in Christ, trusting in him for our salvation and our eternal life with God. For many people, conversion to Christ is the finish line instead of the beginning of spiritual growth. So this kind of person forever remains an infant in Christ, meaning that they never grow out of selfishness, bitterness, criticism, sinful habits like lust and substance abuse and lying. They never learn how to really love people and their lives are forever lived as victims of what others have done to them.

Well, God desires that when we put our faith in Christ and enter into relationship with Him, and when we are reborn by his Spirit, He desires that to be the starting line of our spiritual growth—that it's from there that we spend the rest of our lives growing more and more like Jesus Christ. That our lives, our habits, our thoughts, our motives, our behaviors are being shaped to look more and more like Jesus, and to be in alignment with the desires and thoughts and behaviors of God himself.

And this process of growth isn't automatic and it doesn't happen by just attending church. See, there's people who sit in church their whole lives, but still are full of anger and jealousy and hypocrisy and lust and they gossip and slander and are critical...they never allow the Spirit of God to work on them and bring change.

Well, if I wanted to become physically fit and grow in my fitness level and I went down to the gym and I sat in a lawn chair in the middle of the gym and watched everybody else working out on the equipment for an hour, and then I drove home and I did that once a week. I could do that for a year, I could do that for 10 years, I could do that for 80 years and it would never make any difference at all in my physical fitness. Because it's not just about coming somewhere and observing. If you want to grow spiritually, there is an invitation by God to join into a process of spiritual growth. A process.

And here at Joshua House, we have a process for growing. About how we want to go about developing and growing our life in Jesus. And this is it.

SLIDE:

At Joshua House, we have a process for growing:

Encounter God

Discover Community

Love the World

That's our process. Encounter God, Discover community, and Love the World. And if you do those three things over the course of the next year. If you encounter God on a regular basis by coming into our service and engaging. And by, in your own personal lives, pressing into God one on one, just you and Jesus. And if you Discover community, really open yourself up to relationships here at

Joshua House, get involved in a small group, really get to know people. And if you will Love the World, if you'll step out in service and demonstrate practical love of Jesus to people that need help in this world. If you do those three things, you're going to grow this year. There's no way around it. There's no way to be continually doing those three things and stay stagnant and stale.

Well, tonight I want to spend the rest of our time talking about this first one, Encountering God. I've called tonight's talk, Growing by Encountering God. Let's pray.

TITLE SLIDE:
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Well, all spiritual growth begins by encountering God.

SLIDE:
Spiritual growth *begins* by encountering God

There's just now way to grow spiritually if God is not personally involved. So you could know lots of ideas about spirituality and religious teachings but if you haven't met God and had a personal encounter with God, then you haven't even started growing spiritually. The starting point is never religious platitudes or hip spiritual ideas and principles that happen to be in vogue with Oprah this week. The starting point of spiritual growth is an encounter with God himself.

And tonight we're going to look at a story from the gospel of Luke when a fisherman named Simon Peter had an encounter with Jesus, the Son of God, that changed his life in an instant.

SLIDE:
Luke 5:1-11 (TNIV)

One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. 2 He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. 3 He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."

5 Simon answered, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.”

6 When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. 7 So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

8 When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!” 9 For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, 10 and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon’s partners.

Then Jesus said to Simon, “Don’t be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.” 11 So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

So this is not Simon Peter’s first encounter with Jesus, because he is mentioned in the previous chapter when Jesus heals his mother in law, but it is this encounter with Jesus that changes the course of his life. And this encounter comes in 2 stages. The first stage is just by being a part of the crowd and hearing Jesus’ teaching. Jesus comes up to the lake where Peter is fishing and Jesus happens to stop there and do a workshop on the kingdom of God, teaching people about God and how God wants to reign over their lives right now in a new way. And Peter listens to Jesus speak to the crowd.

SLIDE:
Peter listens to Jesus speak to the crowd

Peter is just one of many people listening to Jesus, but what teaching! Look at this in verses 1-3.

SLIDE:
Luke 5:1-3 (TNIV)

One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and **listening to the word of God**... 3 Then he sat down and **taught the people** from the boat.

So, Peter is hearing this teaching from Jesus, and even though he is just a part of the crowd, he is convinced. He is persuaded that Jesus isn’t just another Rabbi teaching the Jewish law, but that Jesus is somehow different. Now, we don’t exactly what Jesus said, but we know that it made an impact—enough of an impact for Peter to call Jesus “master” as a result. When Jesus addresses him after and tells Peter to go back out and fish, the first word out of Peter’s mouth is “master”. Look at this in Luke 5:5.

SLIDE:

Luke 5:5 (TNIV)

Simon answered, “**Master**, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything...”

The first words out of his mouth is “master.” Peter didn’t need the miracle of the catch of fish before he would call Jesus master. He was convinced by his Jesus’ teaching of the Word of God, and called him master.

I love this scene because it displays the power and effectiveness of God’s Word. Do you know that there is power in the Word of God? Have you spend time reading the Bible and listening for God to speak to you through it? Now it’s no book of magic. I can’t tell you: “Read the gospels and I guarantee that you’ll hear God speak to you.” But I can tell you that the Spirit of God has spoken to us through the scriptures, and the Spirit of God continues speak to us through his word. So if you are hungry for God, he is accessible in his word.

There is something that happens when we hear God’s Word and when we receive the truth of the scriptures into our lives. It has an effect. You may be seeking God tonight, your asking God to reveal himself to you, to give you some big sign or some big miracle. Well, for Peter, he was convinced of the truth that Jesus was the son of God before Jesus demonstrated his power by this major miracle. You have everything you need to meet with God right here.

God has revealed himself through his word, and his presence is with us when we gather together, where we’re in this room right now. God is here with us and speaking to us through his word. And this is a primary way that God is accessible to you. For you to encounter God through the public reading of his Word. Through worshipping corporately together. Through praying and opening up our lives to Jesus.

Now, Peter encounters Jesus in the crowd and believed his teaching. But that was only the starting line, not the finish line of Peter’s spiritual growth. Spiritual growth *continues* through this same process of encountering God.

SLIDE:

Spiritual growth *continues* through encountering God

And this is the second stage of this encounter with Jesus. We can see in this story, that after Jesus has been teaching the crowds about the word of God, and Peter is convinced by his teaching and calls him master, that Jesus then addresses Peter personally. Peter hears Jesus speak directly to him.

SLIDE:

Peter hears Jesus speak directly to him

We see this in verse 4.

SLIDE:
Luke 5:4 (TNIV)

When he had finished speaking, **he said to Simon**, “Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.”

So Jesus has just been expounding the scriptures, talking about theology and God and then he turns to Simon Peter, and the text says, he said to Simon, directly, “Simon, put out into deep water, and let down your nets for a catch.” Fascinating. This has nothing to do with the Old Testament scriptures and teaching people about who God is. This is something that has to do with the mundane, with Peter as a fisherman. He’s sitting in his boat, they’ve been out fishing. And that’s the context that they find themselves in. Then Jesus says, take your boat, go out into deep water again, and go fishing. What an odd thing to tell Peter to do.

You would expect Jesus at this point to say, if he’s going to say anything to Simon Peter, that he would say, Peter, what do you think about what I’ve just taught you? Do you accept me as your personal Lord and savior and do you believe that I’m going to die on the cross for your sins and do you believe that there is no way to get right with God apart from me? Do you believe in that doctrine Peter? He doesn’t ask Peter that question. He says, Peter go fishing again.

Now I don’t know what was going through Peter’s mind, but he was probably pretty confused. He was probably thinking this guy has no idea that I just spent the whole night out on the lake fishing and didn’t catch anything.

Jesus is saying: “I want you to do something that doesn’t make any sense at all.” Have you ever had an experience where you felt like God was saying that to you? I love these moments because it is here that God becomes central. Not just an add on to your life. Not just a way to bless the stuff that you’re already doing, but a voice of authority that can override your best reasons for going your own way and lead you a new way.

This happened in John Wimber’s life. John was the founder of the Vineyard movement of which Joshua House is a part, and before coming to Christ John was a very successful music producer and musician. He had 2 records (not singles but full albums) in the top ten in the US. He could play 19 instruments professionally. All he knew how to do in life was play music. He said that he didn’t even know how to do anything else, not even tie his own shoes. And when he had an encounter with Jesus, God told him to leave it all. The tour that he walked away from was the tour when Beatles came to America. John was with the Righteous Brothers and they were the opening act for the Beatles. John said

no, and walked away. He took a job at a welding company. This was a totally foreign world that he had never done before: doing things like setting an alarm And going to work in broad daylight. He was a night owl. So he's working at this welding factory but he not mechanical at all, so they put him out back cleaning big filthy oil drums. One day, he's back there cleaning out a barrel and covered in oil and his old partner pulls up and walks up to him while John is still doing in the barrel. He hears a familiar voice says: "is this John Wimber's office?" As John stood up he was humiliated. His friend said "John, what are you doing?". John said that he looked down at himself, then looked at his friend, then down at himself covered in oil and said "God did this to me."

His partner had brought a lucrative contract that John was a part of and needed John's signature to get out of it. John was faced with the decision to obey God or get back to his old life. He signed the contract removing himself from it and his friend left.

John made a huge sacrifice when he came to Christ. He said this:

"The thousands of hours of I had invested in my fingers were being replaced with manual labor. Throughout the ordeal, I comforted myself in the back of my mind, thinking, God's just taking it away for awhile, he's a good god, he's probably going to give it back to me later. But it never happened. God didn't say, "If you give me that, I'll give you this." He just said, "Obey me"!

That was over thirty years ago. God didn't call me into the ministry right away either. That didn't come until much later, after I had given him everything. But I have never regretted any of this because God's plan for my life for exceeded my own. I can honestly say that my life is his life working in me, not the fruit of my own effort or skill."

John walked away from a life of privilege and prestige, and stepped into a life with Jesus. God used him in huge ways to impact the church around the world.

My father, Brent, had a similar story, though not quite as fantastical as John Wimber's story. Many of you know that my father passed away of cancer when I was 14. But at the time that my father met Christ, he was working on his Ph.D. in environmental ecology at UCLA under a very prominent and well known professor that was about to retire. So my father and 3 other students were his last crop of students and so he really wanted them to succeed. Well, my dad met Jesus and encountered him in such a powerful and convincing way that lost all interest in what he was doing. He was a man so in love with Jesus that he couldn't see straight. And he heard Jesus tell him "I want to use you to save people." So even though he was finished with all of his coursework, he walked away from his PhD. program because he felt that God was calling him into another direction. He had to face his professor, and say I am walking away. He

went and taught second grade for a few years. And then he became a pastor, and he never looked back. God blessed his life and ministry, and he and started a church in Lancaster California that is still thriving today.

There are times in life when God asks us to do things that don't make sense in life, and the best thing to do is to obey him. That's the best thing to do.

So Jesus tells Peter to do this counterintuitive thing, and Peter responds in obedience to Jesus.

SLIDE:
Peter responds in obedience

And we see this in Luke 5:5.

SLIDE:
Luke 5:5 (TNIV)

Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. **But because you say so, I will let down the nets.**"

I love this response from Peter. I love that even though it doesn't make sense, even though, he says Master, I've worked hard all night, and I've been out there fishing all night. I've been out there fishing all night long and I haven't caught anything. He still says, but because YOU say so, I will let down the nets.

How often do we have great excuses about why we shouldn't obey God? About why God, this is an exception to the rule? I know that you've laid down guidelines about how we're supposed to live. I know that maybe you're calling me into doing something, but here's the seventeen reasons why that's not a great idea. Why I'm an exception. Why this situation is an exception. Well, Peter had a great argument about why he shouldn't go out, but that didn't matter at all because Peter had been won over by Jesus. And so he said, because you say so, I will let down the nets.

Some of you are battling addictions. Some of you are addicted to drugs or alcohol. Some of you are addicted to sex, to pornography, and you've tried a million times to stop, to make a break and to try to stop doing it. But, you come back and you say, because you say so Jesus, even though I've failed a million times, I am going to get up and I'm going to try again. Because you say so. Even though you're tired, even though you're out of hope and you don't have anything left to give, your tank's empty, but because Jesus asks you to do something, you respond in obedience and say, Yes Lord.

And you know what? When we obey God, it really opens up our lives to receive God's help and his blessing. and that's what we see with Peter, that once Peter says, ok Lord, I don't want to do this, and I don't think it's going to work, but

because you say so, I'm going to go out and do it. And then we see that he is surprised by the blessing that comes when he obeys.

SLIDE:

Peter is surprised by God's blessing

Verse 6 says...

SLIDE:

Luke 5:6-10 (TNIV)

When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. 7 So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

8 When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" 9 **For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken**, 10 and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.

These guys were blown away that this miracle happens, that they obey Jesus, they go out fishing again and they have so many fish they can't contain it in one boat. They need two boats. And they can't even contain it in two boats. It says the boats were sinking. That God's blessing after their obedience is so big that they can't even handle it.

Do you have hope that God might do that in your life? If you obey Him? If you obey God, if you obey the teachings of the Bible as we look at Jesus and how he instructs us to live. If you said, ok, I'm going to try to do this. I don't want to live sexually pure, I don't want to stop partying and drinking and I don't want to make changes in my life. I don't want to be kind to people that are rude to me. I don't want to have to never lie and not cheat on tests. I don't want to have to fill out a resume and actually put down my achievements and accomplishments in life. I want to make stuff up!

But, when you say, ok, Lord, I'm going to do it your way, do you have hope that God might do something with that that is so far and above what you could ever do in your life? See, Peter had never had a catch of fish like that. He had been fishing his whole life, and I bet he had some good days, but he never had a day like that. When we obey God, it opens up so much blessing in our life that our lives cannot even contain it. And notice the sign here of spiritual growth. Peter has a sign here. A marker of spiritual growth in your life is...One sign that you're growing is a greater awareness of sin.

SLIDE:

One sign that you're growing: greater awareness of sin

Look at Peter's immediate response when this happens. When God blesses his life, when he catches all these fish, he says, immediately, he falls at Jesus' knees and says, Go away from me Lord, I am a sinful man.

SLIDE:

Luke 5:8 (TNIV)

When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, **"Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"**

Sometimes we think about spiritual growth like we're getting holier and holier and then we walk around and we try to act like holy people. If you're a leader, a small group leader, and people are like, oh man, that guy's really wise and I'm just not like them. You know, sometimes we conceive of spiritual growth as being these notches on our belt. That we're climbing the ranks in the church. You know, a sign of spiritual growth is that you are more aware of how sinful you are. It's like you're getting clearer and clearer understanding of who you actually are.

That's a great sign that you're growing spiritually. You come to Christ and maybe you know about some sins in your life, you know about some big ones, some obvious ones, some areas that you're struggling in, you're blowing it. You come to Christ and say, God I know that it's not because of my own great ability or holiness, it's only because of Jesus. And so I receive forgiveness from my sins and I receive what Jesus has done for me and I take on his righteousness. And I know that I'm full of problems, but the truth is, you don't know the half of it. All you know is the obvious ones.

But the more that you walk with Jesus and the more that you grow in your spiritual life, the more that you're aware of the insidious sins. You're aware of the hidden motivations and the silent judgments that you make against people. The thoughts in our mind and the attitudes of our heart and the million ways that we fall short of truly, genuinely loving people. The more we grow in Jesus, the more we should be discovering the depths of depravity of our own sin. And as we do that it elevates and escalates our view of Jesus. The man without sin, and our desperate need for Jesus.

You see, as you grow spiritually, it doesn't mean you become more and more independent of your need of Jesus. It's the opposite. You become more and more aware of how desperately you need Jesus, how desperately you need his forgiveness. Not just the person in your small group that's struggling with some major obvious sin in their life and their life is totally broke. You realize it's not just them that need Jesus' forgiveness, it's you. They aren't sucking anymore forgiveness of Jesus than you are. We are all, you know, like fire hoses are coming into us of God's grace and forgiveness and mercy. All of us.

Last point. The goals of growth, the goal of spiritual growth is following Jesus, not Jesus following you.

SLIDE:

The goal of growth: following Jesus, not Jesus following you

Look at this in verse 10, here at the end of the verse.

SLIDE:

Luke 5:10-11 (TNIV)

Then Jesus said to Simon, “Don’t be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.” 11 So they pulled their boats up on shore, **left everything and followed him.**

Wonderful phrase. Just a great image. That these guys, man, when they saw this catch of fish and Peter falls at Jesus’ feet and says, Go away from me Lord I am a sinful man. Jesus’ response is, do not be afraid, come with me. I have better things for you to do. And Peter, in a moment, walks away from all, from everything that he had built. His whole course of life was going in one direction up to that point and then he just totally turns and he follows Jesus. This is a sign of spiritual growth and maturity. That we follow Jesus, that Jesus isn’t following us.

See, Jesus has been following you your whole life. He’s been seeking after you, like the parable of the lost sheep. Jesus tells the story of one sheep that strays away from the flock and the shepherd leaves the flock to go after that one sheep. Guess what? That’s you. And Jesus has been going after you your whole life.

But, the goal of us growing spiritually is that we would turn that around and when Jesus captures our hearts that we would then follow after Him. And once we do that in a decisive way, there are still lots of areas inside of us that Jesus has to follow us on. There are all of these caverns of our hearts; there are all of these places that we have shut out to God that God is seeking us out. And so the goal is that more and more in everything we are, in everything we have, we would be following Jesus. That Jesus isn’t an add-on to our life. He’s not just something that’s making my life better. You know, my life’s already going this way, oh sure, I’ll take Jesus. yeah, bless me in what I’m doing God. I’ll add that on to my life.

That’s not the image here. It’s that we would turn and follow Jesus. So when Jesus asks us to do something that makes no sense, we would actually do it. We wouldn’t say, no, here’s the nine reasons why that doesn’t make sense for my course of life that I’ve mapped out, so I’m going this way. It just makes more sense. Jesus has to follow us again. Keep following us. But, when we would finally turn and say, Ok, Jesus, I’m done. I’m done trying to lead you. I want to follow you. What you say goes for my life.

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All living things grow

Our spiritual lives should be growing

At Joshua House, we have a process for growing:

Encounter God, Discover Community, Love the World

Spiritual growth *begins* by encountering God

Peter listens to Jesus speak to the crowd (v. 1-3)

Spiritual growth *continues* through encountering God

Peter hears Jesus speak directly to him (v. 4)

Peter responds in obedience (v. 5)

Peter is surprised by God's blessing (v. 6-7,10)

One sign that you're growing: greater awareness of sin (v. 8)

The goal of growth: following Jesus, not Jesus following you (v. 11)

