

DON'T GROW IT ALONE, PHIL2:12-15, 3:12-17

40 Days of Community #4

◆**Intro:** It happened on top of a pea hill in Saskatchewan Canada. We'd put our our decoys in the dark of morning. Dressed in all white to blend in with the snow goose look of the decoys, we sat still as a literal tornado of ducks, mallards, pintail, teal -circled repeatedly around us trying to decide if they should land or not to feed on the peas. There were literally thousands of birds. We could hear the wind on the tips of their wings like soft whistles as they circled. And then, this floating horde lifted and sailed away for greener pastures. "Why didn't they land?" I wondered out loud. "Too many eyes," said my friend, Tom. "Somebody saw something out of place. When you have 500 birds you have 1000 eyes. If one notices something, they all seem to feel it." Guess what? They are better together! And so are we. This week we focus on not just staying alive, but growing in our spiritual lives, and the blessing of doing it as community.



◆**1. I have a part in my spiritual growth.** Sometimes Christian folk, -especially some in the Reformed tradition that recognize the sovereignty of God, the impossibility of sinful heart ever turning toward God at all without God first granting them to believe- sometimes these followers make a mistake. But first let's read this text:

◆*"But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead*

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in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved. ... For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no-one can boast." Ephesians 2:4-9, NIV.

◆Note "dead in transgression", ... "by grace"... "not from yourselves"... "gift of God"...

◆**A.** And here's is the mistake Christians sometimes make: they rationalize that since faith itself and salvation that comes through it is a gift of God, and since all praise goes to God alone for our justification before his holy throne; since God deserves all the credit for applying the spiritual paddles to our flat-lining souls, - that therefore you and I have no part in our sanctification either. People think that if God wants me to grow, he'll make me grow. If the sovereign God wants my neighbor to be saved, he'll save him.

◆But this is false. Jesus makes you right before God; justification. But Jesus allows you to affect your walk with him in becoming holy; sanctification. Some textual examples...

◆*If we are living now by the Holy Spirit, let us follow the Holy Spirit's leading in every part of our lives. (Galatians 5:25, NLT).*

◆Do not stifle the Holy Spirit. (1 Thessalonians 5:19, NLT).

◆Use every piece of God's armor to resist the enemy in the time of evil, so that after the battle you will still be standing firm. (Ephesians 6:13, NLT).

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◆ Yes God will make happen what he wants, but we also know how he makes some things happen, and we are in the equation. Look what Paul says in the next chapter!

◆ Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. Phil 3:12-14

◆ **B.** This is the apostle Paul here, still trying to grow up in the Lord! Which all raises the question: "What am I doing to grow in holiness?" This is what Paul is talking about in Phil2:12f where he says "work out" your salvation. He isn't saying "work for" your salvation. You can't do that. Don't even try. What might a spiritual workout look like? How do I get exercise for my spirit?

◆ Suppose you and the wife are not seeing eye to eye. You could escape into the ball game on TV as soon as you get home from work. You could disappear and spend the evening on the computer. Or you could read a book like J Dobson's *What Wives Wish their Husbands Knew about Women*.

◆ Suppose you have a child that's getting into all kinds of shady things, maybe runs away now and then. You could bury yourself in work and shrug your shoulders. Or you could take a class on parenting, or read a book on parenting, or talk to a parent you know that you respect.

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Guess what? You get to cooperate in your own increase! Now you can be a slug if you want, but your growth in holiness will be preempted, often until some things are too late; the kids grow up and are gone, the marriage is over, the job is lost, etc.

◆ If you want to become a better person, God's ways will definitely help you. You can become more mature than you are. You can become holier than you are. But holiness is not automatic. That's the definition of insanity: do the same things you always do and expect different results. What will happen if you go to a piano lesson for one hour every week but never touch a piano between lessons? I'll tell you what. You'll waste a lot of money. Now wouldn't that be a bit like going to church every Sunday but not touching any spiritual tools during the week? We have a part.

◆ **2. Sanctification is better together. My spiritual growth is not a private exercise.** Some years ago a gal commented to me that she believed in God but didn't like organized religion. First I tried to think of a disorganized church for her. Then I mentioned that demons were exactly like her; they believe in God but don't like his church either. I like what Rick Warren has said. He said it's a bit odd to love God but hate his wife. After all the church is the Bride of Christ according to the Bible.

◆ **A.** And yet many of us live as though spiritual health is possible all by ourselves. Some never do commit to a local part of the

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Body of Christ. In today's world accountability, and submitting to an authority bigger than the self, or obligating oneself to other people, is not popular. But it's God's design. Many Christian confessions affirm, the Belgic Confession for example, that there is no salvation apart from the Church. That is, the body of Christ is not an option in a healthy and real relationship with Christ. He never intended it to be so. In response to Peter's confession that Jesus was the Christ of God, Jesus said, "on this rock I will build my church." It's never just me and Jesus. We are meant to mature and we can't do it alone.

◆ **B.** I need to include other people in my personal discipleship.

Let's read 3:17 and then 4:1 because they are a complete thought. Everything from 18-21 is a side comment. So it reads

◆ Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you...Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends.

◆ What does it mean? Stability comes in collaboration. Solidity comes with solidarity. It's the beauty of belonging to a local congregation. If you are a serious Christian, your first move is to become a member of Jesus' Church in a particular place. Want some examples of the benefit?

◆ 1) Correction is better in closer community. Professional golfers like Dustin Johnson or Rory McIlroy still have

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coaches! Weird isn't it? You'd think they knew how to golf by now! Tennis players that make it to Wimbledon still have coaches! That's right because we don't get better by ourselves.

◆ Who but those in close community will ever really address a sensitive issue with you? It was 2004 and I was at Willow Creek for a preaching conference; two days of learning finer points of captivating oratory, while also being inspired by a sizzling worship band. It's just that whenever we stood to sing I got a little light-headed and nausea would overcome me, my vision also blurring slightly. The man in the row behind me had the breath of a dying hippopotamus. Now what is one to do? I can't turn around and ask him not to sing to the Lord. I was singing (singing "come Lord Jesus, come quickly!"). Am I going to turn around and suggest the powerful cleansing agents of Listerine? I don't know this fellow. He would be embarrassed, or at least offended. I'm not getting into it.

◆ But let me ask, "Who will?" That kind of conversation needs privacy, close enough relationship to trusted as well-meaning, who can speak as a brother, and who can hold their own breath for long periods of time! If this fellow has no friends like that he'll be leaving bodies in his wake everywhere he goes.

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◆ Just as you don't notice chocolate on your chin, spots on your spiritual life are exceedingly hard to see without other people. That's why the Bible tells Christians to not forsake gathering, to live in fellowship with other believers, to confess sins to each other, to build one another up, etc. Here's an application of the fact that growth happens best in community: love your friends enough to be able to bring up touchy issues. And open yourself up to accountability with others. Seek that level of friendship.

◆ Do you have anyone in your life close enough to call you on the carpet about a failure or flaw? Are you close enough to anyone that they would hear you if you gently tried to warn them of a personal issue?

◆ 2) Discovery comes quicker together. How many of us are coming to come up with the computer chip on our own? How can we learn even the common things history has given our modern lives? We go to school on someone else, that's how. We don't all decide to invent our own wheel or a new math. Did you know that in a matter of 7 measly years after the Wright brothers figured out powered flight, airplanes could take off from ships? For centuries people were trying to figure out how to fly. Once the code was cracked all kinds of people's minds joined in and created usable aircraft. Within 16 short years an airplane had crossed the Atlantic Ocean! Learning is much accelerated in community.

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◆**Conclusion:** So as we can see, maturing, growth, development, discovery -all take our cooperation with our Father, and with his family. Praise God you don't have to *work for* your salvation. Jesus did the whole thing. Paid the whole bill! And he's going to complete his work in us.

◆*He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Phil1:6*

◆And God is always at work in his followers to help them both *want and to act according to his good pleasure*. But we have a big part in our spiritual maturing! So participate in a Life Group or a Bible-study, form friendships and note examples of people you know that have qualities worth emulating, and let people in. If you want more holiness in your life, don't grow it alone. Turn to Jesus and his family even now.