

Pursuing Spiritual Growth and our Fall Schedule

September 2006

“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.”

2 Peter 3:18 NIV

“If you are not making progress (growing) in your spiritual journey, you are losing spiritual ground and vitality.”

When I first heard Dr. Les Eno, a college professor, make this statement over 20 years ago, I was moved inwardly two ways. First, I was a little angry that he thought spiritual growth didn't include some “coasting” time. I thought to myself, ‘who doesn't need a break sometimes?’ ☺ My second response took some time to come to, but was a little more in line with the heart behind the directive in 2 Peter written above; “OK, pursuing spiritual growth is God's antidote against being led astray, and against turning away in mistrust of our Master, Christ Jesus. So... by pursuing growth in Christ, I can experience great security in Him. My responsibility then, is to grow so that I can experience the life He intends, and not miss the benefits of His grace.” Peter tells us that growth in grace is God's plan.

“You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace....”

2 Peter 3:17 ESV

Spiritual growth is God's idea. It is His heart that all of His children experience the benefits of grace through the lifelong process of becoming like our Savior, Jesus. It is my heart too, for every member and friend of New Life to experience the life that Jesus foretold would be ours through His sacrifice for us, and by our faith-filled responses. The following scripture from Acts 2:42-47 summarizes the response of the newly birthed church of Jesus to His gracious gift of the Holy Spirit, and describes the spiritual growth they enjoyed.

“They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

Because it is our heart to grow and become the church Jesus has called for us to become, I have initiated some changes to our Sunday morning format in an effort to be wise about the use of this precious commodity called time. Everyone seems to be pressed by the incessant demands placed upon our time. Everyday is filled with activity from morning till night. What used to be called a day of rest (Sunday) is now a day when we play catch up doing the things we just haven't had time for because of our jam-packed schedules. Returning to God's design of a day

of rest (read that Sabbath) will cost us initially, but will be returned to us many times over. The principle of reaping what you sow applies here.

I am asking you to consider the hours from 9:00 am till 12:30 on Sundays as a time set aside for the purpose of discipleship and spiritual growth. Our current agenda for adults centers around what happens in the sanctuary / auditorium. From September to June we have had two celebration services at 8:30 and 11:00 with a classroom teaching time sandwiched in between. Our goal was to provide two of the essentials for spiritual growth as outlined in Acts 2, but the time given to classroom time was far too short.

This fall we have changed our schedule as the first step in having a full “dual-track” format. The goal will be to have two identical celebration services at 9:00 and 11:00 am in the auditorium along with simultaneous LIFE training classes (4-6 different classes) in the modular building. This format will allow our community the opportunity to participate in two of the essentials of spiritual growth in a 3½ hour time slot: celebration (temple courts /worship Acts 2:46) and discipleship (devotion to apostles’ teaching Acts 2:42). A full complement of children’s classes will be offered during both times slots (a team of folks are excitedly working on a new format including a time of worship for the kids). Our youth will also have their classroom time during the 9:00 am time slot and be with the adults in the auditorium for the celebration service at 11:00 am.

On September 10th we will initiate this dual-track mode with two adult classes offered in both time slots. The idea of beginning with only two classes is to keep us focused upon our church-wide study from Jack Hayford’s book, “Living the Spirit Formed Life” and a Bible reading initiative called, “LIFE Journaling.” I will be setting forth the principles behind “journaling” in the coming weeks as well as, teaching from our fall focus on “Spirit Formed Life.

Please be looking for a letter from me about these upcoming changes. I am excited about the possibilities that accompany faith-filled responses to Jesus’ directives.

The Apostle Paul’s heart in Colossians 1:28-29 expresses my heart about the “why” behind this change in our format:

“We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. ²⁹ To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.” (NIV)

May we press onward together and experience the growth He intends for us and the incredible benefits of His grace.

Pastor Dave