

July 10, 2005

Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

“Growing in Christlikeness”

Eph 5:1-2, 15-20 and Phil 2:12b-13 NLT

Follow God's example in everything you do, because you are his dear children. 2 Live a life filled with love for others, following the example of Christ, who loved you and gave himself as a sacrifice to take away your sins. And God was pleased, because that sacrifice was like sweet perfume to him.

(v15) So be careful how you live, not as fools but as those who are wise. 16 Make the most of every opportunity for doing good in these evil days. 17 Don't act thoughtlessly, but try to understand what the Lord wants you to do. 18 Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, let the Holy Spirit fill and control you. 19 Then you will sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, making music to the Lord in your hearts. 20 And you will always give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Phil 2:12b-13

...you must be even more careful to put into action God's saving work in your lives, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. 13 For God is working in you, giving you the desire to obey him and the power to do what pleases him.

In the book *The Fisherman and His Friends*, Louis Albert Banks tells about a man who was spending a summer near the shores of Lake Superior. One day he came upon an old pine tree that had been blown down by a recent storm. Knowing something about trees, he was intrigued by that huge evergreen lying on the ground. He examined it closely and figured it was at least 250 years old. What impressed him most, however, was what he discovered when he stripped away the bark. It was evident to him that on the day the tree fell it was still growing.

That's the way it should be in the life of the believer. I want to be still growing when I die...at 250 years old! This body may lose physical strength and decline, but the inner person should keep on developing—mentally, emotionally, and above all spiritually—until the day we die.

Acts 2:46-47( NLT) records that following Pentecost the followers of Jesus, “worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity-- 47 all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved.”

The church continued to grow as it had a healthy balanced diet of worship, discipleship fellowship, ministry, and evangelism. Numerical growth through outreach is a sign of a healthy, vital church. God expects us to do all we can to reach out with the gospel – the good news of Jesus Christ. That's why our Children's and teen ministries are so

important. We want children and teens to hear about Christ and want to live a Christian life. It's why Alpha is such a vital part of our church - the unchurched and non-Christians coming to hear about and discuss the Christian faith. It is why I preach evangelistically, why we offer V.B.S. and a children's Christmas play or events during Lent and Easter. It is why we support world missions, all so that men and women and boys and girls will come to know Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. God expects it. He commands it. "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19) was His commission to us. But there is another kind of growth God expects of the Church after a person comes into a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. It is growth in Christlikeness: spiritual growth, maturing in our Christian faith, becoming more and more like Jesus.

Paul wrote, "It's like this: When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child does. But when I grew up, I put away childish things." (1 Corinthians 13:11 NLT). He knew that growing as a Christian into Christlikeness is normal for the believer and brings about changes for the better. Peter exhorted Christians, "Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18 NIV). It's a fact. God wants and expects the Church to grow both numerically and spiritually.

My deepest desire is to have a church of people who are growing in Christlikeness.

That is our calling, by the way. Paul says in Ephesians 4:11-13, Christ gave some to be pastors and teachers... "Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do His work and build up the church, the body of Christ, until we come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature and full grown in the Lord, measuring up to the full stature of Christ."

Pastor Nick and I want to be used by God to help you grow in Christlikeness. That is our desire. The big question is, "How? How does one grow in Christlikeness?"

The Word of God is quite clear on this too. First, though, let me ask, why should we even want to be like Jesus? Who is Jesus? Few people would doubt that Jesus existed or that Jesus was fully human. He had a human body; He was tired sometimes (John 4:6) and hungry (Matt 4:2). He had human emotions; He was angry (Mark 11:15-17), He loved (Mark 10:21), and He was sad (John 11:35). He had human experiences; He was tempted (Mark 1:13), He learned (Luke 2:52), He worked (Mark 6:3), and He obeyed His parents (Luke 2:51). But there is much evidence, actually a great deal of evidence that would suggest that Jesus was more than just a wonderful human being or a great moral teacher. This evidence supports the Christian contention that Jesus was and is the unique Son of God. Indeed, He is God. (*From Questions of Life by Nicky Gumbel*).

As the God-Man He gives life and exemplified how life is to be lived. He was full of life and the joy of it. Thousands followed Him around for the sheer fun of it. They love to listen to Him teach and they felt love, a pure love from Him, like they had never experienced before. Nicky Gumbel teacher of the Alpha course writes of Jesus in *Questions of Life*, "Here was a man who exemplified supreme unselfishness but never self-pity; humility but not weakness; joy but never at another's expense; kindness but not

indulgence. He was a man in whom even His enemies could find no fault and where friends who knew Him well said He was without sin.”

Why wouldn't we want to be like Jesus Christ? He was what we all wish we and other would be. So, again the question, how do we grow in Christ's likeness?

This morning I will mention five things that are essential for your spiritual growth—growth in Christlikeness. I will introduce them today and (perhaps, if it is God's will) expand on them throughout the summer. Here are some habits of Jesus that we need to follow.

1. Devotion: While on earth Jesus spent time alone with His Father in heaven. To grow in Christlikeness, you must spend time with God in prayer, Bible discovery, and praise every day. Jesus wants to meet with you every day. Remember what Jesus said (we looked at it last week from Matt 11:28-30), "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke fits perfectly, and the burden I give you is light."

If you're not growing spiritually, chances are you do not have a satisfying, fulfilling devotional life—you are not spending time with the Lord in prayer, Bible discovery, and praise. We give you a devotional guide every quarter called "Our Daily Bread." Each week we supply prayer requests and Old and New Testament Bible readings. During Advent and Lent we supply Bible readings and thoughts for your meditation. During Lent we gave instructions for prayer and fasting. But we want to do an even better job in helping you grow in Christlikeness through a devotional life.

2. Worship: Jesus not only spent time alone with the Father, He also attended corporate worship on the Sabbath. To grow in Christlikeness, you must enter into the weekly corporate worship experience. Worship is the acknowledgement of the worth-ship of God. We express God's worth through prayer, praise, and the preaching of God's Word. It is God who calls us into worship. The writer to the Hebrews said, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another and all the more as you see the Day approaching" [the day of his coming back again is drawing near –(NLT). More than ever we need to meet together and encourage one another.] (Hebrews 10:25).

3. Discipleship: The Scripture says that we are to make disciples. How did Jesus make disciples? He gathered 12 people together in a small group for the purpose of sharing His words with them, prayer, mutual support, and accountability. This was the Master's plan. That was Jesus' method and I'm not sure it can be improved upon. I believe every person associated with our church needs to be in a small group, a church within the church, for the purpose of prayer, Bible discussion/learning, community building, and accountability. As the church gets bigger it must get smaller. What I mean by that is, as the church gets bigger we need to offer more small group opportunities.

4. Witness: Jesus calls us to continue the work He begun. Jesus said in Acts 1:8, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.” Witnessing helps you to grow in Christlikeness. It’s our church’s responsibility to encourage you to witness and help you share your testimony with others. The Alpha course is one way we can help you do that. Inviting people to special events like a Christmas play or an Easter cantata is another way. But you also need to be sharing your faith as God gives you opportunities and as we pointed out when we studied the prayer of Jabez, you need to pray and ask God to give you those opportunities.

5. Service: Jesus was constantly ministering to others. I tell our membership class that our goal here is an every-member ministry. God has a plan for you. He has a ministry for you and has given you the gifts for that ministry. Have You Found Your Ministry? The best way to do that is to do it. Try something and you may discover a particular ministry is not for you. That’s ok - try something else. But you may get involved in a particular ministry and to your surprise, find you love doing something you did know you would love doing. Evelyn Underhill suggests that so many Christians, “Adorn Christ’s head while neglecting His feet.” In other words, we are far more likely to adorn Christ’s head through worship than we are to wash His feet through acts of service. We want to give you opportunities for service and equip you for ministry as a way of growing in Christlikeness.

### **(Questions)**

1. Are you desiring to know Jesus and be like Jesus? (put your faith in Him today!)
2. Are you more like Jesus than you were a year ago? (In what ways – be specific.)
3. Are you thirstier for God than ever before?
4. Are you more and more loving of God and neighbors?
5. Are you more sensitive to and aware of God than ever before?
6. Are you governed more and more by God’s Word?
7. Are you concerned more and more with the physical and spiritual needs of others?
8. Are you more and more concerned with the Church and the Kingdom of God?
9. Are the disciplines of the Christian life more and more important to you?
10. Are you more and more willing to forgive others?

If the answer is ‘yes’ to most or all of these questions, it is because you intend to grow in Christlikeness, because of your commitment to devotion, worship, discipleship, witness, and service. You are sowing seeds in the Spirit. If the answer is ‘no’ to most or all of these questions, then isn’t it time you made these biblical disciplines a regular part of your life?

Pastor Nick and I would be willing to discuss these five things with you. We want to be God’s helping hand in your life. It is our desire that you grow in Christlikeness.