

Series: G-R-O-**W**-I-N-G in Christ
Message Title: Growing Through **W**itness
Date: Sunday, April 23, 2017
Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:20-21
Speaker: David H. McKinley
Location: Warren Baptist Church, Augusta, GA

Introduction

What is a G-R-O-W-I-N-G Christian?

Grace. "A growing Christian knows the gospel is rooted in God's redeeming grace and is sustained and secured throughout life by His amazing grace."

Renewal. "A growing Christian is identified as one whose life is being reshaped while the mind is being renewed by the Word of God."

Obedience. "A growing Christian is an obedient Christian. More than a person who has enhanced religious thoughts and opinions, authentic growth results in active obedience."

Witness. "A growing Christian provides visible and verbal witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

Today, we are returning to a familiar text in this series:

“Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:20-21 ESV).

There is a title given here, an assignment and responsibility for all of us: *Ambassador*

To be an “Ambassador” means:

- Specific commissioning for a special assignment
- Representative of a sender
- Exercise authority on behalf of another

An ambassador functions as “a representative for a ruling authority”. The United States currently has ambassadors serving in 187 countries globally.

The unfolding drama of redemption (God’s salvation and deliverance of His creation from the fall of sin) includes life transformation and

personal representation of people like you and me! God has always invited men and women to take part in His story, His mission—Abraham, Moses, David, Israel, the disciples and early church. God not only writes us into the story, He also gives us a role to fulfill in His redeeming work.

“Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20 ESV).

2 Corinthians 5:20 is part of a larger context of Scripture going back to 2 Corinthians 4:1: “Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart” (2 Corinthians 4:1 ESV).

What are the implications of knowing the Gospel and experiencing Gospel truth?

2 Corinthians 4:3-7:	Therefore... Go
2 Corinthians 4:8-16:	Grief
2 Corinthians 5:1-10	Groaning
2 Corinthians 5:11–6:1	Going “therefore”
2 Corinthians 5:20	“Therefore”

Note the present tense of the verb in 2 Corinthians 5:20. "We are" means a present and abiding role for ever believer. God is making His appeal through us. This is the place of the active work of God in our lives.

So many want to experience God before they obey God, but when we obey God, then we experience Him.



*As Ambassadors for Christ,
We are to Focus on*
Gospel Representation

Everything about your life is to be about Christ who lives in you.

"For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that One has died for all, therefore all have died; and He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Corinthians 5:14-15 ESV).

This is why Jesus gave this final charge and defining task to His followers:

“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age’” (Matthew 28:18-20 ESV).

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8 ESV).

“As you sent Me into the world, so I have sent them into the world” (John 17:18 ESV).

Sadly, there are indications this role is fading and failing in American churches. Live and let live; live and let die!

Most of us have not shared our faith with someone in months, even years. We become

accustomed to ignorance and avoidance, but we cannot succumb to this!

U.S. population = 324,888,930

(In contrast, 1983 = 240,000,000)

There is a birth every 8 seconds and a death every 11 seconds.

The religious landscape in the United States is quite complicated, and surveys indicate faith experiences are sharply in decline. The vast majority of those living in our country will grow up with little to no religious affiliation.

The fastest growing religious group in the United States today are “Nones” = 71,475,564. These are people who mark “none” on forms and surveys in regard to religious affiliation. This is just below 1/4 of the population! Four out of ten are unchurched. The afterlife may never be a consideration in their lives.

Add to this the “Nominals”—25%. Nearly half of the population has not attended religious services in the past six months except for holidays, weddings, funerals, etc.

Another 10% of the population is part of non-Christian groups: 1.7M Muslims, 1M Hindus, 1M Buddhists—those who have immigrated legally to the United States.

Let's look closer to home. There are approximately 650,000 people living in the CSRA—a community of growing diversity. There are 221 Southern Baptist churches—largest in the CSRA. There are also Catholics, Methodists, Presbyterians, and others.

Although I preach Christ publicly from the pulpit, this does not excuse my personal witness individually.

Our witness should shape our world view and our life focus. Whether student, doctor, educator, worker, builder; we all are representatives of Christ.

“An ambassador is both a messenger for and a representative of the one who sent him, and believers are messengers and representatives of the court of heaven. And just as an ambassador lives in a foreign land, so also do believers. Though citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20), they represent their

King in this world, where they live “as aliens and strangers” (1 Peter 2:11). They proclaim to the lost, perishing rebels of this fallen world the good news that they can be reconciled to the Holy King of Heaven.”

—John MacArthur

Ours is not a gospel of a better life; it is an essential salvation, a deliverance from the greatest condemnation and corruption known to man—that of alienation from the Creator.

Our role of representation is God’s Plan A, and He has no Plan B! We are birthed from God’s mission and for God’s mission. We exist to participate in the mission of God!

See 1 Corinthians 9:19-23—“win”. This was Paul’s goal and it must be ours also!

*As Ambassadors for Christ,
We are to Prioritize
Gospel Intercession*

I believe this appeal is more than simply our public representation, it is also to shape our private prayer—God’s prompting and

movement in our hearts toward those outside Christ.

See 1 Timothy 2:1-6. Today, I want to challenge you to keep and maintain a list of those who are lost or rebels or outside the grace of God in their lives.

Pray regularly, repeatedly and fervently. Pray not only for them to come to Christ, but for God to use you, to guide you, and to give you courage to be a witness to the gospel in their lives.

Pray for times of public response in worship! If we sow no seeds, we cannot expect a miraculous harvest. But we should invest together, pray together, sow in tears and reap in joy!

Pray for a culture of invitation in your life and in our church.

*As Ambassadors for Christ,
We are to Engage in
Gospel Conversation*

We share the message of reconciliation. God is making His appeal.

“The present tense calls for continually making an appeal to those not yet reconciled and still at war with Almighty God and thus in desperate need of a ‘permanent truce’ or ‘peace treaty’ lest they pass on to the next world as God’s enemies who will suffer eternal separation from Him and torturous imprisonment as ‘war criminals!’”

—Barnes Commentary

“God sends His invitation to Christ through us.”

Although we may be weak, limited, afraid, and stumbling, God uses the sincere vulnerability of flawed vessels to bring people into His kingdom.

Witnessing is to be done with the prompting and leading of God’s Spirit. God is at work in this world. We cannot ignore it, and we need to ask for eyes and hearts to see and know.

“It’s not our business to make the message acceptable, but to make it available. We are not to see that they like it, but that they get it.” —Vance Havner

Is it too much to think that we, as a church, should and could see over 1,000 gospel conversations in a years time?

*As Ambassadors for Christ,
We are to Work Toward*
Gospel Celebration

When people come to Christ, a transformation occurs. It is miraculous. I never cease to be amazed at how God can so totally and completely change a life.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17 ESV).

Hear the heart of your pastor today. I want every one of you to know and experience the joy of walking someone across the threshold—to see and share in someone coming to personal faith in Jesus Christ.