Gleaner’s Sunday School Lesson at First Baptist Church

April 28, 2024

Unit: Being an Authentic Church:The church is sometimes called a building, but it's not just a building. The church is a living, growing body of Christ composed of all who follow Jesus Christ as Lord. God placed us in a church to serve, care for others, to pray for leaders, learn, teach, give, and in some cases, die for the gospel. In this study, we will discover what it means to be an authentic church and how each of us plays a role.

Session # 3: Growing in Christ (p. 109)

Scripture: Primary Source: Bible Studies for Life, the Senior Adult Personal Study Guide Spring Edition 2024 or open your Bible to (Colossians 1:9-14, 21-29)

Prayer: Father God, we praise Your holy name, and thank You for blessing us beyond measure. You sent your only Son to die for our sins and have given us the priceless gifts of eternal love and eternal life. Help us walk worthy of Your gifts. We know that the journey toward spiritual maturity lasts a lifetime. Help us grow in the love and knowledge of Christ as long as we live. We pray for the spiritual development of others, and that You will increase our awareness of opportunities to help them grow in their walk with You. We pray for the health and safety of our families, friends, and pastors. Comfort the sick and the grieving, and please forgive our sins of commission and omission. It is in Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Question #1 (p. 109) What is something you own but never use? I have an abandoned car that I never drive because of its size. Our author provides statistical information about infant abandonment that is shocking to us, since it is our nature to birth and nurture children to maturity. What is true with physical infants is also true with spiritual infants. They need the nurture of mature christians to grow in their faith. Paul’s personal ministry to the believers in the church in Colossae did just that. These verses remind us that we too have a responsibility to help and encourage one another to grow and mature in Christ.

Point: We should encourage and help one another grow in Christ.

The Setting: Along with Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon, Colossians is known as a Prison Epistle (Col. 4:3, 18). Paul likely wrote all these letters during his first imprisonment in Rome about AD 60-62. Colossians focuses on who Christ is and what He has done. Paul argued against false teachers who expressed wrong ideas about Christ, and the apostle urged the Colossian believers to remain true to Christ.

Read Colossians 1:9-14 (p. 110) Grow in Godly character and fruitfulness.

Verse 9: Paul heard from a dearly loved brother in Christ, Epaphras, that the believers in Colossae were making great strides in their spiritual development. Paul wanted to see them go farther and deeper. He let them know he continually prayed for them and asked that they be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. Paul wanted his readers to grow in spiritual wisdom and discernment, so they could easily separate truth from the errors of false teaching.

Verse 10: Spiritual growth means we are continually transformed to act, talk, and think less like our unredeemed selves and more like Jesus. The purpose of knowing God’s will is so we can follow it. Paul spelled out what that means in this verse:

Walking worthy of the Lord

Living to please Him

Bearing the fruit of good works

Continuing to grow in knowledge of God

Verse 11: The Christlike life–characterized by things like patience, endurance, and joy–isn’t possible in our own strength. Paul prayed for his readers to be strengthened with God’s power to do His will.

Verse 12, 13, 14: Paul was giving thanks to the Father who enabled believers to share in the saints’ inheritance in the light. This inheritance is the result of salvation and refers to all the blessings the believer receives through Christ in this life and the life to come. Light refers to God’s kingdom on earth, in heaven, or both. Because this inheritance comes from God, believers are guaranteed it will be received. Spiritual maturity is not about rule-keeping or earning God’s approval with good deeds. It’s about living out our love relationship with Jesus by imitating Him in every way. We live to please God out of gratitude, not to earn His forgiveness, since He already forgave us.

Question #2 (p. 112) What are some practices that have helped you grow in your relationship with God?

Read Colossians 1:21-23 (p. 112) Spiritual growth is a necessity for believers but will only bring maturity if we stay the course.

Verse 21: Paul returned to describing what Jesus did for believers through His death. Unbelievers were alienated and far from God, separated and estranged. Theirs was open rebellion with thoughts hostile toward God that resulted in evil actions.

Verse 22: Jesus rescued them from their destructive rebellion. By His death on the cross, Jesus paid the penalty for the sin that kept them apart. God’s purpose was transformation, not just deliverance. God’s goal is for Jesus to be able to present us before Him holy, faultless and blameless in the judgment. Believers will not reach sinless perfection in this life. We can be faultless and blameless only because Jesus provides forgiveness of sin to those who trust Him.

Verse 23: Paul continued discussing his concerns for his readers’ spiritual growth. He wanted them to remain grounded and steadfast in the faith and not shift away from their hope of the gospel. Believers can be misled by false teachings; and we can become trapped in sin. Developing a firm foundation in our faith can help growing Christians avoid these mistakes. It is God’s purpose to move us toward holiness, transforming us to the image of His Son. This can only happen if we stay the course and persevere in faith.

Question #3 (p. 114): What are some things that have helped you stay grounded in your faith?

Read Colossians 1:24-29 (p. 114)Our on-going spiritual growth in Christ can also present us with opportunities to help other believers spiritually mature.

Verse 24, 25: Paul made it clear in this passage that he took responsibility for the spiritual development of his readers, and his end goal was to present them to Christ as fully mature followers. God commissioned Paul to be an apostle to the Gentiles, and to make the word of God fully known Paul rejoiced in suffering, and never stopped growing spiritually. As death drew near, he was still reaching for the goal of becoming like Christ. He penned his letter while imprisoned in Rome, and answered God’s call by preaching far and wide.

Verse 26: The mystery in this context refers to God’s actions in providing salvation to the Gentiles in addition to the Jews.

Verse 27: God’s love for all the world was a mystery that began to be revealed in Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection but was seen in Paul's mission to preach to the Gentiles. He described this wealth of the gospel message as glorious and elsewhere as incomparable. God wanted to make known among the Gentiles the glorious wealth of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. This hope of glory is the confident assurance each believer has of God’s life-long presence in the present, as well as future glorification, an eternal home in heaven (Rom. 8:18-25)

Verse 28: Paul described his proclamation with two words: warning of God’s judgment of unbelievers and teaching the gospel of salvation and Christ’s commands to everyone they encountered.

Verse 29: Paul said he labored for this. Paul worked to the point of exhaustion so every believer can be presented as fully mature in Jesus Christ. He was striving with his strength that worked powerfully in him. He repeatedly balanced his efforts for Christ with God working in and through him, recognizing that his strength came from God alone. Paul wrote 14 of the 27 books in the Bible!

Question #4 (p. 116): How is Christ in you the hope of glory?

Question #5 (p. 116): What are some characteristics of a mature believer?

Summary: Sanctification is becoming holy or growing to spiritual maturity. It results from such actions as prayer, Bible study, and living out one's faith guided by the indwelling Holy Spirit. Because Paul experienced the transforming power of the gospel, it was the subject of every lesson he taught and every sermon he preached. It was for the purpose of producing fully devoted followers of Christ. He understood salvation as an event and process. Anything he had to endure was considered part of the job . God entrusted him with the task of making His message fully known. His determination to help others grow in faith sets the bar high for all of us who make up the church. We, too, should help others become all Christ intended them to be.

Engage (p. 116) On the scale below, with O being immature and 10 being very mature, place a mark that indicates your level of Christian maturity.

 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

What might you do to grow in Christ?

Live it Out (p. 117) We can’t lead people where we’ve never been. We can’t give away what we don't possess. And we can’t preach with power what we’re not practicing with integrity. How are you helping others grow in Christ?

Evaluate. Assess your own spiritual maturity. Identify areas of strength and areas for improvement. Ask God to help you grow closer to Him

Model. Identify a new believer you will befriend and model spiritual maturity. Plan times to meet for encouragement and growth.

Lead. Volunteer to lead a discipleship class at your church or sub for someone so they can take a break and you can grow in your faith.

Prayer: Father, we thank You for working in our lives and guiding us toward spiritual growth and maturity. Help us be more spiritually aware of the opportunities to help others grow in their walk with You, and give us courage to remain steadfast in our commitment to You.Watchword: May the Lord watch between thee and me while we are absent one from another.