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Growing in Grace: Making Real What You Already Know
The Ripple Effect of the Gospel
Colossians 1:3-8
May 14, 2017, Jeff Germon

If you were in a Growth Group last week you would have read all of Colossians together. We actually played it on a Bible app on my phone and then we stopped after each chapter and asked what the main themes were. It was so good. It was like eating at a wonderful buffet of all our favourite foods. I think we all left the Growth Group feeling so satisfied in Jesus and in the little community he has given us in which to grow.

There is so much good stuff in Colossians. The passage we are going to look at today is key. This is Paul's introduction to the rest of the letter. Let's read it and pay careful attention to the ripple effect there is when we live in the confident hope of Jesus.

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Colossians 1:3-8 (NLT)

³ We always pray for you, and we give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴ For we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and your love for all of God's people, ⁵ which come from your confident hope of what God has reserved for you in heaven. You have had this expectation ever since you first heard the truth of the Good News.

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⁶ This same Good News that came to you is going out all over the world. It is bearing fruit everywhere by changing lives, just as it changed your lives from the day you first heard and understood the truth about God's wonderful grace.

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⁷ You learned about the Good News from Epaphras, our beloved co-worker. He is Christ's faithful servant, and he is helping us on your behalf. ⁸ He has told us about the love for others that the Holy Spirit has given you.

Ok, let's circle back and walk through the passage.

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Paul says he *always* prays for the church in Colosse and gives thanks to God for them. What is he thankful for? Remember, Paul likely did not know the members of the Colossians church personally. Epaphras had initially planted the church and had given reports to Paul as to how they were doing. So, Paul says here that he and Timothy have heard of their faith in Jesus which led to their love for people, which had sprung from their confidence in their hope of heaven.

That is a mouth full. But it is very important that we understand this. There is a ripple effect that happens on a couple different levels when you trust that Jesus has forgiven you. God forgives you, not based on anything you did to earn his favour. His forgiveness is based only on the fact that he paid the penalty for your sins by sending his Son to die in your place so you could have a part in his kingdom work and spend eternity with him in heaven when you die. The more you come to believe

this, the more confidence you have, and the more others will be impacted by your life. The power of Jesus in you will multiply your love for him and for others.

If you are actively following Jesus you will see this come to play often in your life. What God wants to do is build your faith in Jesus so his life in you will influence others towards him.

Most of us here have experienced this at some level. How many of you have been through a particularly trying time that tested your faith in God? Will God come through for you? I think we've all experienced this at some level. Our faith muscles get strengthened as we persevere through tough circumstances.

That's what James said.

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James 1:2-4 (NLT)

² Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. ³ For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. ⁴ So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.

Every time we experience a trial in our lives, we have some options. We can get angry and bitter and hard, or we could get despondent and give up. Or, conversely, we look up, surrender to Jesus and learn from him, just like he said Matthew 11:28-30. Take his yoke upon you and learn from him for he is gentle and humble in heart.

We have a choice when we face difficulties.

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Psalms 105:4 (NIV)

⁴ Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always.

When we face the difficulties in our lives with Jesus and see them as opportunities to grow and build our faith muscles, the next time we face a similar obstacle we will face it with more confidence in the Lord, knowing that he is big enough.

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Here's the deal. **Our faith will not grow if we don't have obstacles and challenges in our lives.** We need them in order to learn and grow. Growth WILL NOT take place if we avoid difficulty. That means we need to be okay with failure. We won't always get this right.

How many of you enjoy failing? Nobody does. How many times have we heard the phrase, "Failure is not an option" in movies? Many times. The truth is that, not only is failure an option, it is almost guaranteed if we are growing. We have to be okay with it in ourselves and in others. We need to know the learning curve we have in becoming like Jesus is steep. The Good News is that he is there to teach and empower us.

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We will not grow if we don't chance failure. If you aren't failing sometimes, you aren't trying enough difficult things. Learn to be okay with failing. Learn to be okay with others helping you see your blind spots. This is all part of how we learn and grow.

So, there is a ripple effect in our faith life when we grow in our confidence in Jesus. That is on the vertical level. We grow in our confidence that Jesus is big enough for the storm we are facing so we can face the next one with even more confidence. Our faith grows as we face down giants with Jesus.

In one of my quiet times this past week, I read from the Gospel of Mark (ch. 6) where Jesus walked on the water, out to his disciples who were struggling rowing their boat against the waves and the wind in a storm on the Sea of Galilee.

Just prior to this Jesus built the faith of the disciples by feeding several thousand people with just five loaves of bread and two fish. In the evening, after feeding everyone Jesus insisted that his disciples take the boat across the lake to the little fishing village of Bethsaida while he sent everyone home. After everyone was gone Jesus went by himself into the hills to pray.

In the middle of the night Jesus saw that the disciples were in trouble in the middle of the lake. They were struggling against a fierce storm.

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So, Jesus takes a walk on the water.

Mark 6:48-52 (NLT)

⁴⁸ He saw that they were in serious trouble, rowing hard and struggling against the wind and waves. About three o'clock in the morning Jesus came toward them, walking on the water. He intended to go past them, ⁴⁹ but when they saw him walking on the water, they cried out in terror, thinking he was a ghost.

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⁵⁰ They were all terrified when they saw him. But Jesus spoke to them at once. "Don't be afraid," he said. "Take courage! I am here!" ⁵¹ Then he climbed into the boat, and the wind stopped. They were totally amazed, ⁵² for they still didn't understand the significance of the miracle of the loaves. Their hearts were too hard to take it in.

The phrase that jumps out at me here is, **"...they still didn't understand the significance of the miracle of the loaves. Their hearts were too hard to take it in."**

They had an opportunity for their faith to grow and it seems like they missed it. Jesus gave them a very visceral learning opportunity by including them in his miracle of feeding several thousand people with just five loaves of bread and two fish. That learning experience was meant to build their faith for the next obstacle they would face. It takes time to grow like this so Jesus gave them another learning opportunity in the boat to underscore the fact that he is trustworthy.

One of the things I do regularly is go back in my journal to see how God has been working in my life. It's so easy to forget. We need to remind ourselves of how God has been faithful in the past and he will continue to be faithful in the future.

There is a ripple effect in our faith in Jesus when we trust him. Each time we learn in a deeper way that he is trustworthy, our faith is built and our joy and peace increase.

So, alongside the ripple effect in our vertical relationship with Jesus, there is also a ripple effect that happens on the horizontal level with other people as they see us growing in our faith in Jesus.

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Do you see what's happening here? This is such a beautiful story. Ephaphras brought the Good News of Jesus to the Colossians. It spread from there all over the world, bearing good fruit and changing lives through the love that the Holy Spirit produced in them. What a great story. I see that happening in so many ways at CRBC.

One of the things we do every week as a staff is take time at our staff meetings to talk about what we see God doing in and through the church and we praise God together. The stories are so exciting. We can't tell you those stories without permission, so I'm going to tell you a story from several years ago. I asked permission to tell this story.

When Ruthie and I first moved from Calgary to the coast we were at a church in Vancouver where I was the Youth and Young Adults Pastor. We had the privilege of walking with many young people. There was a young man named Shunsuke who was on a working holiday visa from Japan. He came to church quite regularly and to our Young Adults events. We had many conversations about faith in Jesus.

One day we were sitting in my car in the driveway of the home where he was staying. I asked him what was stopping him from trusting Jesus with his life. He said, it made so much sense and he wanted to believe, but he had so many questions that were unanswered. We talked about what some of those were and then I said, "Shun, you will likely never have all your questions answered. God is too big for that. He is infinite. We are finite. There will always be questions. You may need to just take a step of faith and trust him."

He was totally floored by that. He thought that in order to trust Jesus he had to have everything figured out. Shun and I prayed right there in the driveway of his homestay and he received Christ.

He went back to Japan a few months later. I probably have many of the dates wrong, but I think that was in about 2004 or so. Several years later, Shun told me that his sister, Mizuki was going to move to the Vancouver area and he told her that she should go to Richmond Baptist Church, where I had take on a position as Lead Pastor.

She arrived one Sunday in about 2010 or so. She was not a follower of Jesus, but was curious because of what she saw in her older brother, Shun. Ruthie and I invited her to a class we held for seekers of Jesus. She faithfully came and asked her questions and then met Jesus in a very powerful way, trusting that he was sufficient to save her.

Ruthie and I have walked with Mizuki for many years now and we have seen her grow so close to Jesus. She has one of the most vibrant faiths I have ever seen. She walks so closely with Jesus that when you are near her you experience his presence.

Meanwhile, back in Japan, Shun met his bride, a new follower of Jesus. They both got baptized and they are very involved in a great church. He and his wife, Hiroko came to visit us here a couple years ago and came to church at CRBC. Some of you may remember them.

The story doesn't end there. Their little brother, Keisuke received Christ through the testimony of Mizuki and Shunsuke. I was moved to tears when Shun sent me a video of his little brother, Kei being baptized in a bathtub, and Shun had the privilege of baptizing him. Now, they say, it's just their mother and father who don't know Jesus, but they are praying and trusting Jesus for their salvation too.

That is the power of the Gospel of Jesus. There is a ripple effect that happens when we trust Jesus and let him work through us. We have many stories like this at CRBC. In our Growth Group alone we have story after story of Jesus changing lives and producing fruit in and through our Growth Group members.

After the service we are making our AGM Reports available. Each of the staff and some other ministry leaders have prepared reports with some stories of what God is doing through their ministries. And at the AGM on the 28th we are going to celebrate together the ripple effect that is happening through what God is doing through you at CRBC. Let's read our passage again.

[14]

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This is what is happening at CRBC. I can see it so clearly at times. Jesus is changing us. He is transforming us as individuals and, consequently, as a church, into a people who welcome those who may not think or believe or act the way we do. That is what Jesus did. Jesus didn't just hang around people who lived and believed the way he did. He hung around people who were very different than he was and they liked being with him.

The typical way church has been practiced in the past was that before someone could belong they needed to believe the same we did. Then we made them more and more like us until we felt like we "cleaned them up" enough, and then we allowed them to belong. I'm not talking about church membership. I am talking about creating a culture where we help people have a sense of belonging.

Think about how Jesus did things. He had open arms. He welcomed people first. They belonged to his group, then they believed and followed, and as they followed Jesus they became like him and joined him on his mission.

That is what I see happening at CRBC. Here's how it should look.

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We open our arms and welcome everyone, like Jesus did. **[17b]** I think one of the deepest needs we have as human beings is a sense of **belonging**. We should do what we can to help everyone belong.

[17c]

Then we walk with them. And they walk with us. As we walk with them they meet Jesus and **believe** in him, and our faith grows as we walk together with Jesus and we **become** more and more like him. **[17d]**

And as we and they become more and more like Jesus there is a ripple effect that takes place. The Gospel of Jesus produces fruit in and through us and it spreads contagiously through out the world around us. That is what we have been called to. That is living the life. It is allowing Jesus to do his work through us to **bless** the world.

CRBC is here in Campbell River to be a blessing to the nations. That has been the plan of God ever since the beginning. I see that happening here more all the time. That is what should happen. Day by day, as we walk with each other and with Jesus he will chip away at our rough edges, and slowly transform us to look more like him, producing a bountiful crop of the fruit of the Spirit so others can meet Jesus through us.

Each interaction we have with others is important. We have no idea of the impact of one conversation. We have no idea of the ripple effect, either negatively or positively, of one meaningful conversation with someone. Those conversations have the potential of changing the direction of many lives. Let's live our lives intentionally learning from Jesus how to love those around us so they would see Jesus in us.



Growing in Grace: Making Real What We Already Know
The Ripple Effect of the Gospel
Colossians 1:3-8
Week of May 14, 2017

Objective of this study: To how impactful our lives can be if we allow Jesus to use us.

[Remember, the main goal of each Growth Group is to allow God's Word to change your heart so that others would see Jesus in you and be likewise changed to be like him. He wants to change the world through us]

Worship (5 - 10 minutes)

1. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.
2. Spend five minutes in silence asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
3. After the five minutes have someone interrupt the silence and read **Psalm 105:1-4** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you. **Did anything jump out at you?**

Welcome

Are you going to cheer for the Senators in the Eastern Conference NHL finals?

[It's really important when doing this study that we each think about ourselves specifically and ways we need to grow, not how Christians in general need to grow. Do the hard work of letting the Holy Spirit speak to *your* heart.]

Word

1. What stood out from the sermon?
2. Read Colossians 1:3-8
 1. What does Paul say he's thankful for?
 2. What does Paul say our hope is in?
 3. What does he say the Gospel (Good News) is doing?
 4. What do you see about a ripple effect?

Work

1. With each obstacle we face, there is a ripple effect (vertically - in our relationship to God) that takes place as we look to Jesus, trust him more, and learn from him. How have you see your faith grow like this?
2. In the sermon we talked about the importance of reviewing God's faithfulness for the purpose of building our trust in him. How has this worked in your life? What spiritual discipline could you adopt to do this?
3. There is also a ripple effect that takes place as we interact with people (horizontally). Who first introduced you to Jesus? Do you know who first introduced them to Jesus? Take the rest of the time in your group to briefly tell your story.
4. Pray for each other that God would use you to be a catalyst of hope and love in Campbell River.
5. If you are interested, you could Google the ripple effect leading to Billy Graham's conversion to Christ.