

How to Grow in Grace

by Jack Hyles

To grow in grace, one must look at themselves, the Bible, and God, and strive to fellowship better and more intelligently with God for His purpose.

Duration: 55:39

Scripture: Hebrews 6:1

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Personal Sanctification"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of his message being understood and received by the congregation. He compares it to giving medicine to a dog, where the dog must swallow it or die. The preacher expresses his desire for the young people and teenagers to listen attentively, as he has put in a lot of effort to prepare the sermon. He encourages the congregation to focus on their own spiritual growth rather than comparing themselves to others, using the analogy of climbing a ladder. The preacher also mentions the downfall of Alexander the Great and Arnold Palmer as examples of individuals who had achieved great success but ultimately felt unfulfilled.

Transcript

I guess of all people in the Bible, the Apostle Peter would know as much as any the need of growth and grace. It seems like his growth was so spasmodic, up one day and down the next, hot one day and cold the next, serving God one day and cursing the next, sitting at the table saying he'd never deny the Lord one day and denying the Lord the next. So the Apostle Peter, realizing the problem of growth and grace, writes to the Jewish Hebrew Christians and admonishes them to desire the sincere milk of the Word that they may grow thereby.

He also admonishes them to grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Don't you recall the Apostle Paul wrote the church at Corinth and he scolded them because they were not growing in grace? He said, you're babies, you ought to be eating meat when you're having to stay on milk. And he admonished them or scolded them for being yet babes in Christ.

And so now the writer of Hebrews, I think the Apostle Paul rebukes the Hebrew Christians in Hebrews chapter 6. Brother Colston led us in reading it a while ago. Now I'm getting it. So when we plan to stand.

But we read a while ago about leaving the basic doctrines. The doctrine of repentance of dead works and faith toward God. The doctrine of baptisms and laying on of hands.

Leave the first grade, go on to the second grade and the third grade. Leave the grade school and go on to junior high school and high school. Leave the primary course and go on to something deeper and more advanced.

These are the admonitions of all the writers of the Word of God. Now one thing that's interesting is this. Our description in the Bible is that of something growing.

Every figure, just about every figure that God uses to describe the Christian, describes something that has to grow. For example, we're called plants in the Bible. Now all of us know that a plant is first a seed, then a blade, then an ear, then full corn.

There's the steps of growth from the seed unto becoming the full ear of corn. And when the Lord likens us to plants, he likens us to something that ought to grow and continue in the growth of our Lord. He mentions the fact we must be born again.

He likens us to individuals being born. And in the process of life, there is first the babe, and then the child, and then the youth, and then the adult. Once again, growth.

Just as that we're called plants, the plant grows. We're born into God's family. We're called children.

And the child grows from infancy to adulthood. We're called in the Bible, runners. We're to run with patience the race that is set before us.

And in running, we're progressing. We're going onward and forward. I thought about this.

The Christian life is like a progressive dinner. Mrs. Colston is having for our young people, juniors and seniors, a progressive dinner next Thursday evening. Now at a progressive dinner, you go to one place and you have the salad.

You go to another place and you have the main course. You go to another place, maybe you have the dessert, and you go from one place to the other. Now, if you don't leave the place where you are and go to the next place, you can't get the next blessing.

The Christian life is that way. Unless you keep going forward, you won't get the next blessing. God has blessings for you, but you've got to go forward to get them.

You've got to keep on growing to get them. You've got to keep on going to get them. The tragic thing, the tragic thing.

I know people in this room tonight who've been members of this church ever since I've been pastor here. And honestly and sincerely, as far as external evidence is concerned, you're not doing a bit more for God than you were 13 and a half years ago. Now you're good people.

You're nice people. You're faithful people. And you put your tithe in the offering plate and you come to church on Sunday morning and Sunday night and so forth.

And Greg, you join us too now in the service, if you would please put the stuff up. You're working all back there and join us. And so you're nice people.

By the way, you can't grow unless you eat. You can't eat unless you listen. So listen to what I'm preaching.

And so you're good people, but you're not growing. You don't do any more for God. You don't give any more.

You don't win any more souls. You don't win any souls in some cases. On the other hand, I know people that have just grown in grace.

My, my, my. In these years you've just grown and you can almost see you grow. Now, why should a Christian grow in grace? Well, that's easy.

A Christian ought to grow in grace because God can enjoy you more. God can enjoy you more. Now, every one of us remembers, those of us who have children, remember the early days of a child's life.

It's very nice to have a little baby. It's very, very nice. It's nice to play with a little baby, but you don't want to play with a baby forever.

You know as well as I do that the older a child gets, the more you can enjoy a child. The more you can talk intelligently to a child, the more the child can talk intelligently to you. My mother and I enjoy each other now more than we did when I was a younger, when I was a teenager.

I didn't have time for mother. But the older I've gotten, the more I enjoy being with my mother and talking with my mother. We can fellowship together now better than we used to fellowship.

One thing is I'm bigger than she is and she can't wail the tar out of me like she used to. So our Lord wants us to grow. That's the purpose of creation.

God made us for fellowship with Himself. Now, if we have fellowship with Himself that is perfect fellowship, then we must grow in grace and become more like Him. I've said this before.

I think one of the hardest things, if not the hardest thing about the Savior's life on earth is the fact that He had no one with whom He could talk on His own level. No one understood Him. His own family thought He was nuts.

His own people thought He was crazy. They said much learning, no it was Paul that said that. They said He's mad.

He's beside Himself. They couldn't understand Him. Why? Our Lord was so far above anybody else.

Every once in a while I'll talk to somebody about Blue Denim and Lace, my book on Blue Denim and Lace. And they'll say, that chapter, and I mentioned some chapter that's pretty deep in Blue Denim and Lace. And they'll say, let me ask you a question about it.

And they'll ask me a question. And boy, my antenna goes up and I think, reckon they understood all I had in mind when I wrote that chapter. Boy, that's tremendous.

And so we'll sit down and have a chat about it. Why? I did like to do that. That's why I want to grow in grace.

That's why you ought to grow in grace. Your fellowship with God can be sweeter the more like Him you get and the more near His spiritual level you can get. And the deeper you go in Christ, the more God can enjoy you.

And that's the main reason, I think, for spiritual growth. Look, if God made us for fellowship with Himself, then spiritual growth would be that we might fellowship better and more intelligently for God's purpose. We have a strange idea that fellowship with God is all for us.

Oh, I love to talk to God in prayer. I do, but God loves to talk to me and God loves to have me talk to Him and God loves to be with me. Prayer, I'm sorry, fellowship with God is more for God than it is for me as far as enjoyment's concerned.

And so I can be more like Him if I grow in grace. Thereby, I can enable Him to enjoy me and fellowship with me more. Now, how can a person grow in grace? How can I become a better Christian? How can I grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ? In the first place, look at yourself.

Look at yourself. How can you grow in grace? Look at yourself. In the second place, look at the Word.

In the third place, look at God. In the fourth place, look at the right crowd or the right kind of people. Now, in the first place, if you want to grow in grace, look at yourself.

Don't you recall the Apostle Paul wrote to the Church of Philippi? He was talking about pressing on toward the mark of the high calling of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord. And the Apostle Paul said, I count not myself to have apprehended. Now, the word count there is a word that means I have investigated myself.

I have taken inventory of myself. I have taken perspective of myself. I have had an introspective look at myself.

I have looked at me, and I count not myself to have apprehended. Look at yourself. Hey, be honest with yourself.

Step on the scales. See how much you weigh. Let her measure your height.

See how tall you are. Look at yourself. Most of us spend too much time looking at each other.

You know what I can do? I can get thinking about Dr. Billings, and if I look at him long enough, you know, I can find a lot of things wrong with him. I can get thinking about Brother Fisk, and if I look at him long enough, I can find a lot of things wrong with him. By the way, I can look at old Jack Hiles, and if I look at him long enough, I find a lot of things wrong with him.

So I'd rather look at Dr. Billings. See? I'd rather look at Brother Fisk. You know why? Because I'd rather find things wrong with him than with me.

A person who's always finding fault, a person who's always gossiping, a person who's always criticizing, a person who's always judging somebody else is one that doesn't look at himself enough. Now you say, well, what's wrong with that? You're robbing yourself. You can't grow in grace if you look at others.

You can't grow in grace if you don't look at yourself. Look at yourself. Look.

One of my books has this in it, and Greg, I'm serious now. You put that stuff down and listen to me, and I'm serious. And so I'd rather for you to listen than to make a theological outline.

I want you to hear me, and I want everybody to hear me. I've got some things to tell you, and I want you to hear what I've got to say. And I don't want to have to ask you again now.

So consequently, you look at yourself. Now in one of my books, I have these things written, something like this. As a person climbs up the Christian ladder, don't look down to see how far you've come.

Look up to see how far you have not gone. Not a one of us, not a one of us in this house tonight, but if he looked, what if he looked down and said, boy, look what I used to be, and look what I am now, could become proud of himself. So the best thing to do is look up and say, boy, look where I haven't gone yet, and look where I am now, and you become dissatisfied.

Looking down from which you come, boy, I thank God I used to be this, and now I'm this. I know. But if you can say, I should be this, and now I'm this, you'll become, you're growing in grace.

Did you know that a lot of testifying is, is, is, how to put this, a lot of testifying is unspiritual, and is complacency, and is carnal? I just want to thank God I used to be, like Mr., what's his name, fellow that, oh, Mrs., Mary Brown, your dad's name, Bolin, Mr. Bolin, who stood up one night and testified, and he's 70, 70 years old over, and he said, I've been saved just a little while, and I thank God, used to, before I got saved, I used to drink liquor and cuss, and he said, thank God, since I got saved, I haven't taken a drink of liquor, and I cut down on my cussing quite a bit, too. And now what's he doing? He's looking back, you see, looking down. Well, praise the Lord, I used to be a vile sinner, and now, thank God, I've been delivered from all of that.

That's good. But be sure you look up and say, I still am a vile sinner. I've got a lot of ground yet to cover.

Don't look down too much and see. Paul said, forgetting those things which are behind me. What's he talking about? Forgetting my spiritual growth? Forgetting how far I've come and pressing forward.

No, nobody can win the race. You get 50 yards down the 100-yard dash, and you're about two yards ahead, and you look back and say, boy, so far I'm ahead. Yet so far you're getting behind, too.

You look behind, you'll never get ahead. Always looking forward, looking to what the ground you've not covered, looking to the place, area you've not conquered, looking to the height you've not reached. If you want to grow in grace, look at yourself.

Number two, you want to grow in grace, look at the Bible. Look at the Bible. The very things the Bible calls itself reveals to us that no one can grow in grace properly unless he looks at the Bible.

For example, the Bible is called a mirror, the mirror of the Word of God. The Bible is called a plumb line. Now let me ask you a question.

Anybody here look in the mirror before you came tonight? How many ladies in the choir looked in the mirror before you came tonight? Would you? The others said you could well have done so. But now then, you know why you didn't look in the mirror? You thought you looked okay. Yeah, you said, I'm pretty as I am, I'm bound to look lovely tonight.

And you thought you looked okay. Those that looked in the mirror thought you might need some help. But every one of you looked in the mirror to find out where the help was needed.

When Becky was a little baby, just a little baby, I carried her on my shoulder. And I was, I forget where I was going to go, but I was going to preach. And I had a, maybe it was to a funeral.

No, no, a wedding. And I had a dark suit on. It must have been navy blue or black.

Oh, I was a handsome dude. You never saw anything like it in your life. And so I had a dark suit on and I thought I looked so nice.

But I carried Becky somewhere before I went. And she decided that she had more room, more room in the world than she was in her stomach. She's very good about deciding that.

And so she decided to deposit on my left shoulder, back here, what was in her stomach. Except she gave me no warning that it was. Now, when you, I won't go into anything like that.

But anyway, she gave me no warning. And the girls on the front, hey girls, close your book here. Young lady, close your book and listen to me now.

And in case anybody else has a book open, you'll close it too. And I won't have to call you down. But I want you to hear what I've got to say.

If I, listen, when I spend all week and a part of the week studying to give you something, I want you to get it. If I got to cram it down your throat, like you'll give medicine to a dog. Ever give medicine to a dog? Open his mouth, pry it open, hold it open, stick a spoon in there, put it out, squeeze his jaws, he has to swallow it or die, one or the other.

And that's how you're going to get my sermons too. You're going to swallow to die. And I'm going to open your mouth and pry it in.

That's why I make deacons wake up and young folks listen and teenagers quit talking. Because I worked awful hard. It may not seem like much, but I worked awful hard to get it.

And so you're going to get it before, before I go. But, so I thought it looked so pretty. And I went to the wedding or whatever it was, and everybody kept looking at me and looking at me.

And I thought they, everybody wanted to speak to me. They'd look at me and ah, hi. And it wasn't till I got home and looked in the mirror that I found out that I had regurgitation all over my back, all over my back.

And there I was saying, dearly beloved, we're gathered together in the sight of our Lord and this assembled witnesses and to unite this man and this woman in the holy wedlock. And everybody's laughing and so forth. You know my trouble? I didn't look in the mirror.

That's one reason you're dirty and don't know it too. That's one reason you got to send your life and don't know it. You say you're a pretty good Christian.

Well, yes, I'm a pretty good Christian. Look in the mirror and you find out you're not such a good Christian at all. You won't grow engraved until you look in the mirror.

I was, I got written down where I was, where was I? I was, I was in a conference and it was, it was out in Washington, in Washington state. It's just been a couple, three weeks ago. And I saw the cutest little baby and I, and I, I wanted to pat the little baby and right before the service.

And so I, I said, let me carry the baby. Let me just hold the baby in my arms. And the baby said, like that.

And I, come on. And I talked to the baby and they're liking me to put the baby on my arm. I know how to carry a baby.

By the way, this also is one of those regurgitating kind too. And it was also a Betsy Wetsy I found out. But anyway, I, I, but it had all, it had all that stuff that you want when you go to the, to go to the, get it all.

And so I, I patted the baby on the arm and I went to the pulpit to preach and everybody went, did you know I'm as dumb as I was 20 years ago? Still, why? I didn't look in the mirror. Anytime you put a baby on your shoulder, look in the mirror before you go anywhere. That's your trouble.

The Bible says that the word of God is a mirror. Look at it. The person who reads the Bible most will grow in grace most not only because the Bible's food, because the Bible reveals your need.

The Bible reveals what the need is. You look in the mirror and you see a spot on your nose and you, you wash the spot off or you see your nose is shiny and, and you, you powder your nose and you look in the mirror and you see your hair's messed up. You do this twice.

That'll straighten any kind of hair in the whole world like that twice. And, uh, so, uh, but how do you know you look in the mirror? The Bible's a mirror. You want to grow in grace? Look at yourself and look at the Bible.

Look, listen to me. I don't care who you are. You can quit all you want to quit.

You can start praying all you want to pray. You can go to church until you, until you live at the church and you can, you can start everything that you ought to start, but you are not going to be the Christian you ought to be. So you live in this book, you've got to live in it and look at it all the time.

It reveals the needs of the Christian. It's the mirror on that. The Bible is called a plumb line.

Now you young whippersnappers don't want much what a plumb line is, but back yonder years ago, and it was a couple over here. Quit talking, please folks behind you are trying to hear. And, uh, so, uh, years ago, the, uh, we used to take a plumb line.

What's a plumb line? You get a string and you put something heavy on the end of it. You hold it from the top of the building. It reveals the crookedness of the building and the Bible's called the plumb line.

It reveals our crookedness holding it up. And as this straight plumb line comes down, it reveals our, where we're wrong and where we're crooked. And so if you want to grow in grace, you must look at the word.

Now let's get down to the main thing. You want to grow in grace, look at yourself. Want to grow in grace, look at the word.

Want to grow in grace, look at God, look at God. Matthew 5, 48 says, be you therefore perfect, even as your father in heaven is perfect. Now nobody can live above sin, but everybody can try.

Nobody can live without sin, but everybody can try. Nobody can become perfect as God is, but everybody can try. You know what? I think that's so wonderful.

Suppose that the Bible had said, be you therefore perfect, even as Dwight L. Moody was perfect. Aren't you glad it didn't say that? Because then when you became as good a Christian as Dwight L. Moody, you couldn't grow in grace anymore. Or be you therefore perfect, even as John the Baptist was perfect.

Would it be too bad? If anybody ever became as good a Christian as John the Baptist, they wouldn't grow in grace anymore. So be you therefore perfect as your father in heaven is perfect. That means the best Christian in the world still needs to grow in grace, doesn't it? The best Christian in the world still needs to grow in grace.

A great painter one time painted a beautiful, beautiful painting. And he got through and he said, I shall never paint again. I shall never paint again.

And someone said, what did I ask? What did you say? I shall never paint again, he said. And they came and they asked, why? Why will you never paint again? And he said, because that painting I just finished satisfies me. It satisfies me.

It's what I think a painting ought to be. And because it is what I think a painting ought to be, I shall never paint again. Now listen to me.

You know why many of you folks do not grow in grace? Because you look at your life and say, it satisfies me. It satisfies me. Now the reason is, you're comparing yourself with man and not with God.

Listen, did you know the best Christian in this house tonight might be the biggest backslider? Girls, hey, listen to me. Did you know the greatest Christian in this house tonight could be the biggest backslider? You say, wait a minute, wait a minute. The best Christian in the house could be the biggest backslider.

That's right. That's right. Let's suppose that the best Christian in this house is that far ahead of the second best Christian in this house.

And let's suppose that he slides back and he's still better than the second best Christian, but he's less than what he used to be. He's a backslider. He has sliddened back, but he's still the best Christian in this house.

One of the sad things, a couple right here, one of the sad things about our Christian lives, we compare ourselves with somebody else. Oh, we look around and say, boy, I don't work. I guess I'm about the best Christian here on the job.

All right. And in my Sunday school class, I'm the best member of my son. Listen, you'll never be what you ought to be for God.

Could you look to God and say, I'll compare myself with God? Isaiah, in Isaiah chapter 6. Let me just read it to you. In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord. You know why I think Isaiah saw the Lord? Listen, I'll tell you.

Isaiah loved dearly King Uzziah. King Uzziah was his hero. Isaiah was reared to the feet of King Uzziah.

King Uzziah was all that Isaiah wanted to be. And all of a sudden, King Uzziah died. And Isaiah said, my idol is stripped out from me.

And my model, my example is gone. And Isaiah said, then I saw the Lord. I saw the Lord.

And Isaiah saw the Lord. And what did he say? Woe is me. In fact, I have it right here.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up. And his train filled the temple. And above it stood the seraphim.

Each one had six wings. With twain, he covered his face. With twain, he covered his feet.

And with twain, he did fly. A fellow came to me one time and said, Brother Howells, he said, you see, with twain, he covered his face. And with twain, he covered his feet.

And with twain, he did fly. What does that twain mean? What is a twain? I said, twain, one's on a twack. That's what a twain does.

And with two, he covered his face and so forth. And his feet. And one cried to another and said, holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.

I wonder why he said holy, holy, holy. Why did he say holy, holy is the Lord of hosts? Or holy, holy, holy, holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. Because there's three in the Godhead.

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. Let's go further.

The whole earth is full of his glory. And the post of the door moved with the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, Isaiah, then said I, woe is me.

When I look at Dr. Billings, I say, woe is he. When I look at Jesus, I say, woe is me. I look at Brother Hilton, I say, woe is he.

When I look at Jesus, I say, woe is me. When I look at Brother Fisk, I say, woe is me. When I look at Jesus, I say, woe is he.

When I look at Jesus, I say, woe is me. I don't mean the kind of woe you said to the mule down in Alabama now. And Dr. Rice said when he was a kid, he used to say, When the roll is called up yonder, and the mule thought he was saying woe, and it always stopped when he was saying when the roll is called up yonder.

When I say, when I look at you, Brother John, I say woe is Brother John, woe is Brother John. I look at him, he says, Shall we plan to stand, please? I get up, while I'm looking at him, what do I do? I make the same mistake, same dumb mistake, and use the wrong words, get my tang all tangled up, just like he did. And I look at Jesus, and I say woe is me.

I look at Jim Vineyard, and I say woe is he. I look at Jesus, and I say woe is Jim Vineyard. I say woe is me.

I look at Ray Bordway, I say woe is Ray Bordway. I look at Jesus, I say woe is me. The critic doesn't look at Jesus.

The gossip doesn't look at Jesus. The one who complains doesn't look at Jesus. The slanderer doesn't look at Jesus.

The one who looks at Isaiah didn't say it. And I saw the Lord high and holy and lifted up, and His train filled the temple, and the whole building of earth was filled with His glory, and the post did move, and I said woe is my neighbor. He is a terrible kind of fellow.

I get the second hint, no, Isaiah said woe is me, for I am undone. And then the Bible says, Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar, and laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this has touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. You get your sin purged when, when you look at the Lord and say, Woe is me.

The woe of conviction, and then the low of cleansing. And then down in verse 9, And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not, see ye indeed, but perceive not. Now what is it? Woe, lo, go.

Woe is me, I have seen the Lord. He said, And now then your sin is forgiven. Why? You have seen the Lord.

Isaiah looked up and he said, I've been looking at King Uzziah. I didn't know that I was so bad. I thought I was pretty good.

I've been looking at King Uzziah. But now that King Uzziah is dead, I see the Lord high and holy and lifted up. Oh, I'm not what I ought to be.

Listen to me. You want to take pride out of your life? You want to take pride and boasting out of your life? You get up every morning. Now listen to me.

Listen to me. Listen to me. You get up every morning.

You get up every morning and you take this book and you read its pages and you fall on your face and look up to God and say, Oh God, I want to see you and talk to you and fellowship with you. And before you get off your knees, you'll be saying, Oh, I'm not what I ought to be. Oh God, forgive me.

Oh God, I'm so unlike you. I'm not like what I ought to be. Why? Look at God.

If you want to grow in grace, you look at man. You'll never grow. Look at God.

Compare yourself with him who never sinned and who never had an evil thought and through whose lips never came a foul word and into whose mind never came a thought of criticism or a dirty thought and into whose path never came a wicked step. Oh, you look at him who raised the dead and healed the sick and cast out devils and caused the lame to leap and the blind to see and the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak and still the wave and calm the storm and the one who blessed the little children and the one who was the perfect son of God. The centurion who wanted to find something wrong with him said, Surely this was the son of God.

And Pilate who wanted to find enough wrong with him to condemn him to die said, I find no fault in this man. And Pilate's wife said, Have thou nothing to do with this just man. Why? They looked at Jesus.

That's why. Oh, my dear beloved members, walk with God. Walk with God.

Walk with God. Far too many of us spend too much time with each other, not enough time alone with God. Look at God.

Look at God. That's one of the reasons to walk with God. Did you know what? Dr. Billings, did you ever play golf with Cotton Nails? Cotton Nails is six foot seven.

He can hit a golf ball so far you can't really, can hardly see it. Now I used to play golf a little bit and haven't played in years now, but I used to play golf a little bit. In fact, in Texas, I used to play every week.

That's back when I was nervous on Monday morning, but I used to, but I used to play golf. And one thing I can do, now I can't putt, the ball is always bigger than the hole I'm shooting at. And I can't putt, and I can't chip, you know, a little, I call chipping like crocheting and knitting.

Anybody can do that. You chip the ball up and before I can hit the ball, I hit it. I can drive the ball.

I mean, on a good day with wind in my back, in Colorado, 8,000 feet above sea level, with a little squirrel that pushed the ball along while it was rolling, I can drive the ball sometimes 275 to 300 yards. And boy, I tell you, now that's in Texas. That's 100-yard drive and it rolls downhill a couple hundred yards.

But I've always been a little proud of myself because I can hit the ball a long ways. Now, when you get close to the green, I've got to, you know, I've got to sort of ooch a little bit. You know what ooching is? You play marbles? Ooching.

That's what it is. Ooching is a Greek word. It means fudging or cheating.

And so, but I played golf. One day I was down in Florida and Cotton Nelms was pastor of the church where I was. He weighs about 250.

He's six foot seven. And I mean, he's a giant of a fellow. He was the state champion in Florida and the Tampa City champion for several years.

I didn't know it. And I thought, now boy, here's a chance for a little guy like me to show this big fellow how powerful I am. And so he said, you hit first.

I said, no, you go on first. I thought, get this guy the way you know him. And he hit that ball.

And we watched and watched and watched and watched and watched. It was 325 yards. It rose and rose and rose and rose until it got right over the green.

And like a dead duck, it fell right on the green. He said, what you want to say? I said, is there a ping pong table around here anywhere? Now I played with Elmer Ward one time and my drives looked like Cotton Nelms compared to his. But you know what, when you compare yourself to little puny Christians and you look at people all the time and then all of a sudden you look at the Lord and you say, I'm not what I thought I was after all.

Oh my soul. You know, I never forget it. When I was a kid preacher, I thought I was going to be a great preacher when I first started out.

Little did I realize I was going to end up like this. But I thought I'd be a great preacher. And I got me a sermon or two that waxed eloquent.

I mean, boy, I mean, I used some alliteration and all that kind of stuff and waxed eloquent. And I thought it was getting pretty good until one day I preached right after R.G. Lee preached. And I wanted to quit the ministry.

In fact, I thought I already had after I heard him preach. Oh, listen, when you walk with God and every day you look up and say, oh, look, I've got a, here's an example. It's a perfect example.

Here's a picture of me, Max Palmer, and Phyllis Tenton. Now let's take the picture and do it like that, just like that. That's just me and Phyllis, right there.

Boy, what a man. What a man I am. Look at there.

Huh? What a big fella. But then if I put her out and leave me with Max Palmer, I say to myself, what, a man? Good night. Look at that little rock.

Huh? Looks like you beside me. And all depends on which one you look at, doesn't it? Huh? All depends on whether you look up or down. When I look down at Phyllis Tenton, I say, boy, I must be Charles Atlas.

When I look up at Max Palmer, seven feet, eight inches tall, I say, good night. I feel like I'm effeminate. I feel like I'm a big sissy.

I look down at Phyllis Tenton. Where are you looking, up or down? You want to grow in grace? You're going to have to look up and realize. For example, did you know if our goal here was to be the world's largest Sunday school, we're stuck now, aren't we? Huh? But if our goal is to do better next year than we did this year and keep on going for God, then we're not stuck, are we? If we compare ourselves to every other Sunday school in the world, oh, boy, oh, boy.

But if we compare ourselves to what we ought to do, this great Chicagoland area with millions of people, without the gospel of Christ, say, boy, what a crowd tonight. Here in the holiday season and college is out and the weather's bad. Look at this crowd.

Do you know what you do? Get in your car and drive around some Sunday night and see who's not here. And so you look up to God and you say, oh, God, I look at you. I'm not what I ought to be.

I fall so far as you are. Alexander the Great, at the age of 29, had conquered the known world. And at the age of 29, Alexander the Great said, I have no more worlds to conquer and drank himself to death and died a premature death.

I'm a sports enthusiast. I'm a member of Arnie's Army. How many of you know what Arnie's Army is? That's Arnold Palmer's fan club.

I've been pulling for Arnold Palmer to win a tournament ever since he won his last one in 1932. I pull for him every time. I do.

You know what happened to Arnold Palmer? He had no more worlds to conquer. That's what happened to him. He won everything there was in sight to win.

There was nobody to match him. And what happened? He quit improving. That's what happens to you, too.

You say, well, I guess I'm pretty good compared to everybody else. But look to God. Look where you haven't gone.

Look what you haven't conquered. Look how you haven't grown. Look what you failed to do.

Look what's ahead of you. And then you can grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord. Look.

Want to grow in grace? Look at yourself. Want to grow in grace? Look at the Bible. Want to grow in grace? Look at God.

Keep your eyes upon Him. Want to grow in grace? Look at the right crowd. Look at the right crowd.

You run with the right crowd and you'll grow in grace. Run. Now, why? I'll tell you why.

I went to Japan. I went to Japan back down there several years ago. And everybody in Japan just about is run.

And I felt like Wilt Chamberlain. You ought to go to Japan. You ought to go to Japan.

You wouldn't have to look up to a lot of folks. The Japanese people are short. And the men are very short.

In fact, one fellow walked up to me on the street. He saw Russell Anderson and me on the street. He walked up and he said, You fellows Americans? Yeah.

You want women? You want women? I looked down at him at that height. I said, I'm going to count to three. If you're not gone before I count to three, I'm going to beat you to a pulp.

I said that to everybody that's under five foot four. And, boy, I felt. I looked down at him.

Boy, I was just about ready to let him have it, you know. And like I would some sailor, you know, that I know I can lick. And so I, Going to let him have it? Fine.

A little run. I'd walk down the street in Japan, you know. Float trotters.

Really, I did. And why? I was comparing myself to Japanese. I got on the airplane the other day.

And the University of Louisville basketball team was on the plane. I walked down the aisle of the plane and said hello to a stomach. Looked up.

Had 12 Max Palmers. Great big tall guys. So I tiptoed.

You watch me sometimes. You watch me. When I baptize a big tall fellow in the baptistry, I always get on my tiptoes.

You watch me. You'll laugh next time I do. I baptize a big tall fellow.

I don't want to be short. I baptize a fellow six foot four. I get on my tiptoes.

And I'll ask him. I'll say now stoop your shoulders just a little. Why? I want to be big.

That's why. But on the airplane. I found myself so dissatisfied myself.

I wanted to get bigger. Here's a six foot eleven. The other night on the airplane coming back from Nashville, Tennessee.

Looked over across the front of the plane. And in walked a fellow. All these big colored basketball players.

They walk alike. Walk like this. And they all have tams on.

No bill on a cap. And it pops over to one side. And they all have satin kind of clothes.

And big long coats. And big flashy ties about that wide. And in walked this guy.

And he sat down across the aisle from me. And I said good night. Good night.

I had to fold him up to sit him down. And so I looked over and I said, hey, you must play basketball. He said, yeah, for the Harlem Globetrotter.

And I started talking about basketball. Did you know when the time came to leave the plane what I did? I stood up. He stopped to shake his knee.

And you know what I did? I sat back down. You know why I sat back down? I didn't look very good beside him. I waited with his, as they said in Texas, clean off the plane.

Clean off the plane. Why? I didn't look very good up beside him. I didn't want folks to see me beside him.

That's one reason why you compare yourself with that weak, scrawny Christian. Hey, you go to some state university and they may say he's the finest fellow in this university. I know.

Why don't you go to some Christian school where you can compare yourself with good, godly Christian people and you'll see you need to grow in grace. You mark it down. If for no other reason our kids that go to state universities do not grow in grace, if for no other reason than the fact that in comparison to the crowd with whom they run, they look so much better.

One of our young men came to my office not long ago, and he said, Brother Hyle, I'm going to Bob Jones University. This had been a couple of years ago. It was before the better school was built.

And, uh, but, uh, I'm going to go to Bob Jones University. He'd been wrestling with the state university. Been wrestling.

He wanted to go to a state university. Finally, he came. And I said, Why have you decided to go? And he said this statement.

He said, I'd rather be average among the best than best among the average. And that's what I'm saying. I'd rather be average among the best than best among the average.

Take the same person. Comes to First Baptist Church. Did you know that people in our church, who come to our church, that, that don't come but Sunday mornings and sometimes on Sunday night.

Now listen. They move to some other area and join a church. Did you know that sometimes they'll make them deacons right away? You know why? Because some of our people, pardon me for saying it, who are the scrawniest members we have, look like Wilt Chamberlain in other churches.

We have folks that can't teach Sunday school here because they're a smoker or something else. They go to some other church and you can, and they take that scripture, says Rebecca lit off her camel, and try to prove that that means you can smoke cigarettes. And so they go to some other church.

What happens? What happens? They make them Sunday school teachers. Why? I'll tell you why. You run with the wrong crowd.

You won't want to grow in grace. You'll compare yourself with the crowd. You always compare yourself with the crowd.

The other day I was at a conference down in Pasco, Washington, south of Spokane, a hundred miles or so. Went out to eat at a place, and I saw a fellow walk in with a bunch of Christians. They asked him to lead in prayer.

Before they ate, they were eating at a restaurant, and they asked him to lead in prayer, and I watched. Boy, he prayed. I heard some of his prayer.

Our great and loving Heavenly Father, we come into Thy presence as humble as we know how, thanking Thee for this provision for our lives. Our Father, thank You for the service today, and bless the service this afternoon and again tonight. Oh, thank You for the America, the beautiful, the land of the free and the home of the brave.

And as Dr. Rice says, he did not say, Thank You, the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, but he prayed and he prayed and he prayed. That same night I went to another restaurant to eat near the motel, and that fellow was eating by himself. Same fellow.

So I decided I'd see how long he prayed. He was by himself. He didn't think anybody was watching him.

So the food came, and he went, I began to eat. What's the difference? Crowd is in. Crowd is in.

When he was with God's people, he felt a need to do better. When he was by himself or in the wrong crowd. No Christians there! When I was in Texas as a kid, I went to Adamson High School, W.H. Adamson High School over in Old Cliff.

So I went with a girl one night to a football game. She went to Woodrow Wilson High School, and we were playing Woodrow Wilson. Well, in those days, one school sat on one side, and the other school, folks cheering for the other school sat on the other side.

And great crowd. We used to have 15,000, 20,000 people in high school football games. So I said, OK, we'll sit on Adamson's side.

That's my school, first half. Second half, we'll sit on Woodrow Wilson's side. That's your school.

Well, we sat on Adamson's side. Hey, I cheered! Hey, whoopee! And hot dog and rah, rah, rah. We had some wonderful cheers.

Coca-Cola, Pepsi-Cola, any kind of pop. We can beat the Wildcats in any kind of slop. We had a lot of real, real nice.

And, um, ox skin, pig skin, any kind of leather. We can beat the Wildcats in any kind of weather. Tremendous.

Tremendous. Tremendous. And, uh, so, ya pep, ya pep.

Oh, we can't give that one. That has some cursing in it. But anyway, uh, better stop that one a little bit.

Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha. It's not cursing, but it's a little slang along the way. And I'd say, praise the Lord when we got there.

But, uh, so, halftime, she says, time to go sit on Woodrow Wilson's side. Well, we went and sat on Woodrow Wilson's side. And our team got good.

And, boy, our team got the ball. And the first time they got the ball, it made about ten yards. I said, ah! Next time, a little while later, our team got the ball, did pretty good.

And I said, yay! And the next time, I said, whoopee! And the next time, I just felt it inside. What happened? I was in the wrong crowd. That's your trouble, too.

That's why you don't witness like y'all do when you're in the wrong crowd. That's why when you get in the wrong crowd, you don't pray, you don't read. That's why you don't take your Bible out in the wrong crowd.

Don't you think if you got in the right crowd, you could see others who've grown. You wouldn't compare yourself to some little weakly people who'd maybe not even saved or barely know God at all. But you compare yourself to great spiritual Christians.

And before you know it, I'll tell you what you do. I'll tell you what you do. You run around for a while with some little back-spinning Christian.

Spends half her day gossiping on the telephone. Spreading tales about a neighbor down the street. You spend your time with that crowd.

You won't grow in grace. Why? You won't see any need. You'll be pretty good compared to that person.

I'll tell you what you do. You go with some great Christian for a while and be around a man like Dr. John Rice for a while. And before you know it, you'll begin to feel a little bit dirty.

And before you know it, you'll say, I'm not what I ought to be. And before you know it, you'll be on your face saying, Oh God, help me to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord. I can go a step further than that.

You spend some time with God. I learned this. I learned this a long time ago.

Not long enough, but a while ago. I learned that to be the kind of Christian you ought to be, you may have to be considered sort of a loner. Where was I the other day? Where was I? I forget where I was.

Was it Louisville? No, it wasn't Louisville. Not sure where I was. Oh, Pennsylvania.

I was in Pennsylvania. And a fellow walked in and said, I understand that. He said, can we bring you anything to eat to your room? And I said, to my room? Why? But he said, I understand that you're sort of a loner.

And I said, no, I'm not a loner. I didn't tell him. But anybody that's going to walk with God, as much as you ought to walk with God, is going to have to be a loner a lot.

You can't be a back slapper, chamber of commerce greeter. Now, I don't mean to be cool. I don't mean to be unkind.

I don't mean not to ever be with Christians. But I mean there are going to be times when others are having parties when you're alone with God. There are going to be times when others are having a big time and you're alone with God.

And you look up and you say, oh God, I see you high and holy and lifted up. And you train, fill the temple. I don't know who, I've said this many times, I don't know who the best Christian in this room is tonight.

But I know one thing. Whoever he is doesn't know it. I don't know who the best preacher in the country is.

But whoever he is has no idea, no idea in the world. The truth is, until we become disgusted with ourselves, we'll never grow in grace. The Apostle Paul, the greatest Christian apart from our Savior himself, who ever walked on the face of the earth, said, Oh wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the bondage of sin? I'm the chief of sinners.

I have taught not myself to have apprehended. I'll close with this. Here's the prayer I pray the most for myself concerning you.

I pray all across the country and I pray behind this pulpit every week for God to help me to be the kind of preacher you need, the kind of pastor you need, the kind of Bible teacher you need. But the prayer I pray the most is, Dear God, give my people a good Christian as a pastor. A good Christian.

There was a day when I read a Bible because I was supposed to read it. And one day I decided to read it because I wanted to read it. Let me ask you a question.

Have you been looking at God lately or others? Have you been looking at the little scrawny Christians or the strong, giant Christians? Have you been looking in the mirror lately at the Word of God? Have you counted yourself? Get on the scale tonight, right now. Get on the scale. Look at yourself.

Look at yourself. Now look at the Word. Now look at Him.

Now look at other great Christians. How do you measure up? How do you measure up? I'll never forget the day that Brother Ron Perkey sat right up here in the other building. Brother Ron and Sarah.

He was a layman then, deacon of the church. Now he's on the staff. I looked up one day in the service and saw Brother Ron holding a little girl.

A girl, wasn't it? Holding a little girl. And I said to myself, I don't believe that baby's normal. I don't believe that baby's normal.

I called Ron and Sarah to my office and I said, Ron and Sarah, do you think the baby ought to go to the doctor and be checked? Well, what do you think? What do you mean? And I said, maybe the baby ought to be checked. It doesn't look quite developed right to me. And they took the baby to the doctor.

The doctor said, finally, after some tests, the baby would never be normal. Would never be normal. And there were tears and there was heartache and there was sorrow.

And it wasn't long that I stood down here at the Huber Funeral Home back in the back room, a little handful of people, and there was that little baby seven months old lying in the casket. And we cried. And we tried to help.

I wonder if God looks down to me sometimes and says, I don't believe old Jack is normal. I don't think he's developing like he ought to develop. Wouldn't that be an awful thing? Wouldn't that be an awful thing? Not to be a developed child? To be a retarded child in God's family? Not to be what I ought to be? Brother Vineyard, you know what I want God to do? When I come to pray and I say, Our Heavenly Father, I want

the Father to say, Here comes old Jack.

He can understand me a little bit. Here comes old Jack. I mean, he has grown enough to where I like for him to talk to me.

I like the fellowship with him. I wonder what the Father... Let me ask you a question. Anybody ever bother you a lot? Anybody sort of like that? You know, room for rent, that's in the Belfry.

Like these sailors over here. You don't know them. Anybody ever bother you a great deal? Remember that lady? What was that lady's name used to come here in the old building over here? It was nutty.

I mean, it was not retarded. I mean, it was not normal. Hey, folks.

Remember her? Was it Gertrude? Anybody remember that lady used to... She wanted to sing Home Sweet Home one day in the service. She came down and asked Brother Jim during the offertory if she could play Home Sweet Home on her French harp. One day we were having a service and she came walking right down over this side, stood right here and just looked up at me.

Brother Jim looked and said, What's wrong with you? She said, I've moved. I want my name changed on the church record. My dress changed on the church record.

She was, you know, like some other people. Anybody ever bother you a lot? And that lady... Oh, I think another lady, too, used to call the office a lot. A lot of folks remember this lady.

Hello. Brother Harp. Would you pray for my husband? He's about to quit me.

Next day she called back. Brother Harp. Hello.

Would you pray for my husband? He's about to quit me. One day she called and I said, I hope he does. She bothered me.

It got to where when I walked in in the morning, there she was at the door. And I walked out in the evening, there she was at the door. I walked out the door and she used to be outside the door in the hall waiting for me.

Every time the phone rang. Hello. Hello.

Would you pray for my husband? He's about to quit me. Poor fellow. God bless him.

If anybody's going to have a crown in heaven, it'll be that man. God bless him. I hope there's some kind of nursery in heaven where folks like that can go.

Not like him, but like her. So she won't bother him up there. And me either.

I don't mean I won't bother him. She won't bother me. And oh, she bothered me.

And it got to where when she had come. I dread to see her come. And I'd say, Lord, make her stop in Brother Lyons' office before she gets all the way down here.

You know what I'm talking about? You don't know what I mean. Well, there's just one of them. That's your problem.

But it bothered me. You know why? She was. I mean, she didn't understand.

I couldn't understand her. She couldn't understand me. Our conversation levels were far, far apart.

I'd like to think that maybe I've grown in grace enough for when I bow my head and look up to God and say, Heavenly Father, this is one of your children. This is Jack. I'd like, I hope the Father doesn't say, Oh boy, here he is again.

I'd like to think the Father said, There's Jack Hiles again.

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