

Sermon

February 28, 2010

Grow! Series

Start Small

Matthew 13:31-33

Summary: How does God grow His Presence in our lives? There are two ways to grow: by the Power of Addition or the Power of Multiplication. Jesus explains to us that God's growth strategy harnesses the incredible Power of Multiplication to accomplish in us what we could never do for ourselves.

I. Addition or Multiplication?

A. The Power of Addition

- 1. Human beings have in many ways mastered what you might call "the power of Addition."**
- 2. Think, for example, about how we go about building truly great and impressive things – like a skyscraper.**
 - a) The contractor begins by building the foundation – one truckload of concrete at a time.**
 - b) Then the construction crew starts ADDING things like steel beams, floor decking, more concrete, wiring, ductwork, and so on.**
 - c) The building rises by the ADDITION of one floor at a time until the building reaches its final height.**

3. Everything we build – from the Great Wall of China and the Pyramids of Egypt to the world’s largest cruise ship or the house you live in – is built by the Power of Addition.

B. The Power of Multiplication

1. But there is another way of building which is infinitely more Powerful than the Power of Addition.

2. You are an example of that other Power – the Power of Multiplication.

a) You began your physical existence as a one-celled embryo with DNA from your mother and father.

b) But you didn’t stay a one-celled organism for very long!

3. If the embryo that was you had been limited to the Power of Addition, it would have had to function like a Queen Bee and produce more cells – one at a time – each to be added to the developing body that you are now.

4. Instead, that one cell did something much more wonderful:

a) It divided itself into two cells with the power to divide again.

b) Those two cells divided, producing two new cells with the power to multiply themselves.

C. Addition or Multiplication?

1. So which is more powerful?

2. Well, think of it this way:

a) 10 generations of one cell simply ADDING one more cell creates a grand total of 10 cells.

b) But when the single cell employs the Power of Multiplication the results are astounding:

(1) 10 generations of one cell multiplying itself produces not 10 cells, but 512 cells!

c) How?

(1) It's simple: 1,2,4,8,16,32,64,128,256,512.

3. And in the next ten generations the results are even more impressive:

a) 20 generations of ADDITION produce only 20 cells in total.

b) But 20th generation of each cell doubling itself produces 524,288 cells – which in turn will be over 1 million cells in the next round!

4. There is no way that any one cell in could produce the ten trillion cells that make up your body by the process of simply adding one at a time; but by harnessing the Power of Multiplication that one cell produces a fully working human body in under 9 months!

II. God's Growth Strategy

A. The Kingdom of God

1. So how do you think it is that God grows his Presence and Kingdom in our lives: by the Power of Addition or the Power of Multiplication?

2. Jesus tells us that God unleashes His life-changing power in our lives and in our world in the same way that Life grows in the natural realm:

a) Matthew 13:31 NIV He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed which a man took and planted in his field.

b) Matthew 13:32 NIV “Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches.”

c) Matthew 13:33 NIV He told them still another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.”

3. God always starts small, but harnesses the Power of Multiplication to grow His Kingdom:

- a) His plan to rescue His people from slavery in Egypt began with a 3 month-old baby floating on the Nile River in a basket.
- b) His plan to rescue Israel from the giant Goliath began with a kid picking up 5 rounded stones to put in his slingshot.
- c) His plan to give the entire world the gift of eternal life began with a baby in a manger.

B. The Letter

1. God's way is exactly the opposite of the way of religious effort and self-improvement.

2. When WE try to make ourselves better, we resort to the Power of Addition:

- a) Say, for instance, that you want to break a bad habit and replace it with better behavior.
- b) There is nothing wrong with such an effort – we should all try to do our best.
- c) The problem is that our best efforts can only result in SUBTRACTING and ADDING.
- d) We take something out of our life and try to put something better in its place – one action or thought at a time.

3. In trying to fix ourselves through the Power of Addition we doom ourselves to failure:

- a) We make rules and expectations for ourselves that we can never fully achieve.
- b) What's worse, there is nothing we can do about past failures – they can never be subtracted from the record.

c) As Paul puts it: “...for the letter kills.” (2 Corinthians 3:6b).

4. A lifetime will never be long enough for us to ADD enough good deeds and thoughts to make us perfect and whole.

a) If a one-celled embryo ADDED one new cell every second, it would take 3170 years to create the 10 trillion cells that make up your body – a bit too long for any one lifetime~

b) Likewise, you can never make yourself into a person perfect and pure before God and healthy and whole in this life by trying to simply ADD good thoughts and actions.

C. The Spirit

1. God’s plan for your life is not to substitute or add a few improvements; His plan is to transform you entirely:

a) 2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

2. Paul describes this process of God changing us as a “metamorphosis”:

a) Romans 12:2 NIV Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.

3. The word “transform” is the translation of the Greek word “metamorpho-o” from which we get the word “metamorphosis.”

a) God offers to change us from the inside out – one thought and action at a time.

b) But the changes that God makes MULTIPLY in wonderful and unexpected ways.

c) And we become someone we could never have become on our own.

III. Getting Started

A. The Most Important Decision

1. The most important decision you will ever make in your life is whether you will grow your life by the Power of Addition or the Power of Multiplication.

2. The Power of Addition means that you will run the program:

a) You will set the goals and standards.

b) You will make the rules and try to keep them.

c) You make lots of changes and accomplish some good things, but you will never realize your true potential.

d) You will never become the person God made you to be.

3. The Power of Multiplication means letting God GROW Himself inside you:

a) It means accepting the fact the “the letter kills but the Spirit gives life” (2 Corinthians 3:6b).

b) It means taking a huge risk – a leap of faith that God will do in you what you could never do for yourself.

B. Caterpillar or Butterfly?

1. Caterpillars to Butterflies:

a) We all know what caterpillars do: they eat.

b) But simply adding leaf calories only makes a fatter caterpillar.

c) The day comes when the caterpillar stops eating, spins a cocoon, and submits itself to a virtual death/rebirth process.

d) Old things pass away/everything becomes new.

2. It is not the Power of Addition that transforms the caterpillar into a butterfly, but the Power of Multiplication – as millions of cells reproduce themselves to create a whole new reality.

3. Your most important decision:

a) caterpillar or butterfly?

b) Addition or Multiplication?

c) Letter or Spirit?

d) Self or Jesus in my life?

C. Getting Started

1. We make the decision to let God grow us by accepting Jesus as our Lord and our Life.

a) Like the caterpillar, we choose to die to our own efforts and pride.

b) We ask God to come into our lives and remake us – transform us – with His power.

2. At our invitation Jesus comes to live inside us.

a) We begin to “do” Life with Him in every situation, in every thought, in every action.

b) Instead of simply giving us a set of unattainable rules, He guides us and encourages us to take those life-changing steps that we could never do on our own.

3. God starts small – but grows us for Eternity

- a) God’s strategy is to work like a single yeast bud or a tiny mustard seed, starting small, but MULTIPLYING healing and strength from day to day.**
- b) The work goes on deep down inside where only we and the Lord know what is happening.**
- c) But the work that God begins so painstakingly within the limits of Time is a work that prepares us for Eternity – as we become the person God made us to be.**

4. I invite you to let God unleash the Power of Multiplication in your life this Spring:

- a) You may have never accepted Jesus into your life as your Savior and Lord.**
- b) If so, I invite you to make that decision this morning.**
- c) You may have done so, but have fallen into the trap of trying to fix things yourself.**
- d) Whatever the case, the Lord is ready to grow a new You.**
- e) So, let’s get started.**