

[Let me welcome those who are listening to our worship service on KFNW this morning. We are live and local, so to speak, and if you were not able to get to your home congregation this morning because of the cold or other issues, we are delighted to be sharing this worship time with you.]

Next Sunday: Pastor Dave Sorenson --- Oak Grove Chapel Choir

I love it when people send me emails that make me chuckle. One of our members sent one on Friday. I was just sitting down to compose today's message...

"Pastor Doug, remember what George Burns said about sermons: 'The secret of a good sermon is to have a good beginning and a good ending; and to have the two as close together as possible.'"

It is a good thing I have thick skin! Thank you, Lynnet, for sending me that.

We are finishing a Sermon Series today. We have been looking at the words from the Baptism service which parents promise to live by as they bring up their children in the faith. We are looking at how we are doing in our lives with these Baptism promises. Would you say the Baptism promises on the screen with me...

*I will attend the services of God's house.
I will grow in the Christian faith through holding the Scriptures in my hands.
I will live in the covenant of my Baptism.
I will live in communion with the Church.
I will seek to live a godly life.*

Today we conclude our Sermon Series with the theme: "I will seek to live a godly life."

Near the end of his life Paul said to young Timothy: *"Teach these things, Timothy, and encourage everyone to obey them... these are the wholesome teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. These teachings promote a godly life."* [1 Timothy 6:2-3] Circle the words, "a godly life."

Peter said: *"God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him..."* [2 Peter 1:3] Again, circle the words "a godly life."

Now, if you are like me, there is a part inside of you somewhere that is saying, “Aw, come on. I didn’t sign on to play the harp! I didn’t agree to be holier-than-thou! I want to live my own life and have some fun.” The godly life gets kind of a bum rap in some circles as being a boring life.

So the first thing we have to remember about the godly life is this: **“The Holy Spirit is not trying to change us into what we are not; the Holy Spirit is working to grow us into who we are!”**

We have to do a couple of things to understand deeply what that means. Please humor me and do this: think of 2 or 3 things that you love to do.

It could be ice skating, or it could be training for the Fargo Marathon. Could be reading computer software reviews on the Vista Operating system, or it could be watching commercials on Super Bowl Sunday. Could be Xbox 360, could be sudoku puzzles.

Think of 2 or 3 things you love to do – no right or wrong answers, just what you like to do. Share those 2 or 3 things with one person sitting by you this morning. If you do not know the person you are sharing with begin by saying, “Hi! I am Doug, and I love to eat cookie dough.” Take a moment to share...

Here is what you hopefully found out from that exercise: You are unique because God made you unique. I doubt that any two people had the exact same 3 things that they love to do.

The point is this: You were made to be you. That is what Soren Kierkegaard meant when he said, “Now, with God’s help, I shall become myself.”

I love the way Gene Peterson translates Psalm 139. Look at your hands or your feet or your ear while I read these words from the Psalm:

*Oh yes, Lord, you shaped me first inside, then out;
you formed me in my mother’s womb...
Body and soul, I am marvelously made!
You know me inside and out,*

*you know every bone in my body;
You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit,
how I was sculpted from nothing into something.* [Psalm 139:13-15 The Message]

You are unique because God made you unique. And God wants you to grow up to be – you. That is the point of the godly life.

“The Holy Spirit is not trying to change you into what you are not: the Holy Spirit is working to grow you into who you are!”

The next point for living the godly life is this: We need to know what makes us feel close to God.

In a book about growing in faith¹ there is a list of nine ways that people are drawn near to God. Which of these nine best describes the way that you relate to God?

- Naturalists feel closest to God when they are involved in the outdoors.
- Sensates feel closest to God when all five senses are engaged.
- Traditionalists feel closest to God when there are rituals, symbols, familiarity.
- Ascetics feel closest to God when there is solitude and simplicity.
- Activists feel closest to God when they are battling some injustice.
- Caregivers feel closest to God through caring for someone who is hurting.
- Enthusiasts feel closest to God when they are experiencing a celebration.
- Contemplatives feel closest to God when they are adoring God.
- Intellectuals feel closest to God when serving God with their minds.

I am a mix of an Enthusiast and a Caregiver. That is the way God wired me. When I am playing a guitar... When I am caring for someone who needs a hand... Then I feel like I am doing what God created me to be.

For some of you that is not your thing. You need to be involved in the climate change discussion – you are activists. Or you need to be in your camouflage clothes sitting in a tree stand watching a magnificent buck stately walking through the woods – you are naturalists.

The godly life is not about you being changed into what you are not: it is about finally becoming who you were intended to be: growing into who you are. God intends for us to grow in the way God shaped us: so we need to know who we are. Spend some time with this list this week, and spend some time with God. Ask God who he is shaping you to be.

And now the last point for living the godly life for this message: We are invited to make like a tree and grow.

One of the most common pictures of growing in Christ in the Bible is of a tree. Three biblical examples:

- Jesus told of the fig tree – the story I shared in the Children’s Message this morning. The man was not looking for apples or oranges or bananas on his fig tree. He was looking for figs – he was looking for the tree to produce what it was intended to produce.
 - In Psalm 1 is another story of a tree. “They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season...” [Psalm 1:3] It describes a tree bearing what it is intended to bear.
 - In the Letter to the Colossians Paul says, “*Let your roots grow down into Christ, and let your lives be built on him.*” [Colossians 2:7] Once again we have a picture of a tree to illustrate the growing life of faith.
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There are four things a tree does. The godly life God intends for us involves these four things:

1. **Grow deep.**

The opposite of growing deep is this... This is a ***bonsai*** tree. A bonsai is a dwarfed tree or plant. They are kept purposefully small by tying off their roots.

God has no intention to keep you small. God’s intention is quite the opposite. Grow deep. Then you will be able to...

2. **Grow up.**

A woman came to a Pastor with tears in her eyes. Her twenty-six year old husband had been killed in a farming accident. She was now alone with three pre-school age children.

"I don't know how I am going to be able to get along without him," she sobbed. Then she took a deep breath and said, "I know one thing. I can either get bitter or I can get better."

The Pastor was so amazed by this woman – by her courage and her ability to grow in spite of such pain – that he wrote a book titled, "You Can Get Bitter or Better."²

Growing up is not always easy. But growing up is so much better than growing bitter or cranky.

3. **Grow strong.**

One of the most remarkable stories in all of sports is the career of Lance Armstrong. In 1996 he was diagnosed with testicular cancer which had metastasized to his lungs, abdomen, and brain. His doctors told him he had a 50% chance of survival. After he survived his cancer they told him they really only gave him a 10% chance of survival. They only said 50% to give him hope.

Armstrong survived. But then, in his own words, "I ate Mexican food, played golf, and laid on the couch."

That all changed one day. He writes: "One day my wife, Kristin, put down her fork and said, 'You need to decide something: Are you going to be a golf-playing, beer-drinking, Mexican-food-eating slob for the rest of your life? If you are, I'll still love you. But I need to know. I am not going to sit at home while you play golf.'

"Suddenly, I understood... I was purposeless, with nothing to pursue. That conversation changed everything."³ With new commitment Armstrong grew strong, winning seven Tour De France races.

God invites us to grow strong in love, joy, peace, patient suffering, gentleness, kindness. God will still love us if we are golf-playing, beer-drinking, Mexican-food-eating slobs. But that is not God's full intention for our lives.

4. **Grow out.**

Tree rings. I love to look at tree rings. Someday I want one of those tables made from a huge tree, and you can see the tree rings. I want one to remind me that each year God wants us to – grow out.

Listen to Simon Peter..."We had been fishing all night. We did not catch a thing. As we were cleaning our nets this man came and asked if he could speak to the crowds from our boat. We pushed out a few yards, and he spoke about God. Our hearts were touched. He talked like God was right there in the boat with us.

"After he was done, he asked us to go out into deep water. We told him that we would not catch anything there. But, after what he said about God being so close...

"We did what he said and caught the largest catch we had ever caught. I was scared and awed and amazed – and felt like my life was worthless and dirty.

But Jesus said, "Peter, do not fear. I have a purpose for your life. You were good at catching fish. I want you to continue to use that gift. But from now on you will catch people for the Kingdom." Finally I became what God intended me to be. Amen.

¹ Gary Thomas, [Sacred Pathways](#)

² James Moore, [You Can Get Bitter or Better](#)

³ "Back in the Saddle" by Lance Armstrong, Forbes, 12.03.01.