

GROW

COME AS YOU ARE. DON'T STAY THAT WAY.

Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"

"Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments."

"Which ones?" the man inquired.

Jesus replied, "'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'"

"All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"

Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Matthew 19:16-22

Whatever is not growing is dying.

Ancient proverb

We have studied about who God is, how he loves us, and how we should love him in return. We have studied how that love should overflow to others and manifest as acceptance and embrace. But if we are honest with ourselves, we still struggle with "Why?" Our central question as we struggle to live as faithful Christ followers in a broken world, colliding with broken people and faced with continual temptation and distraction is, "How shall I behave?"

Indeed, this is the question the rich young man in the story above is wrestling with. Hopefully when we get to the bottom of it, our response will not be to walk away, but do not be so quick to judge this young man. Could you do it? If I told you right now that the only way you could follow

Jesus was to sell EVERYTHING you own and give it away to strangers, would you head home and immediately start liquidating all your stuff on eBay? This would be a struggle, and you know it. Fortunately, I don't believe this is exactly what Jesus is saying. So, relax.



Actually "How shall I behave?" is one question that contains two – first, "What will be the content of my behavior?" and second "How shall I do it?" Both excellent questions, to which Jesus answers, somewhat cryptically, "Follow me!"

The next three segments, which fall under the heading **GROW** will attempt to tackle the practical outworking of Jesus' answer. "Follow me!"



GROW 101

WHY?

Up to now, we've been focusing primarily on what we believe and why we believe it. Now we are going to shift gears from why we *believe* to why we *behave*. Once we understand the *why* (GROW 101), we can dig into the *how* (GROW 102) and the *what* (GROW 103) of Christian behavior. In other words, before we can figure out how to GROW as a Christian, we must understand why it matters.



Why do we behave? Surely it would be easier to do whatever we want. So, why? (Don't read ahead!)

CALL

Why should we behave? What is our hope and how does it empower us as Christ followers? This is a really good question. There are a couple of options that many Christians subscribe to:

1. We should behave because we L_____ God and because God L_____ us.
2. We should behave because we fear P_____.

While these two options may be factually accurate, I am not convinced that they get to the heart of the "why." They suggest that our hope springs from either fear or feelings. While it may be wise to fear God and appropriate to love him, let's be honest, neither seems very compelling from an ultimate destiny standpoint. If you're honest, you probably don't get too excited about avoiding hell (a scary place you've never seen) or being buddy-buddy with God (a scary guy you've never seen). So, where is our hope? I would like to propose a third option.

If we have children (or know someone who does), why do we provide for and protect those children? Is it because we love them and they love us? Of course, in part. Is it because we are afraid to go to jail for child

endangerment or abandonment? Sure, to some degree. But are these the REAL reasons we should look out for our kids? No. We protect and provide for them because we are responsible for them; we are their first and best hope to have a bright future. They are our legacy. This is real; it is tangible and it grounds our hope in something much greater and more compelling than mere feelings or fear. I believe this is the very same reason we must seek to model Christian behavior:

3. We should behave because we are the I _____
B _____ of God (his legacy) and he C _____
us to a great V _____.



But if this is true, what exactly is this vocation? We have touched on this, but what is our ultimate hope? Simply put, our hope is to reign in glory with the Father as priests and rulers – the way God always intended (Genesis 1:26-28). This is our calling – our VOCATION – and it should empower our lives.

Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. ~ Revelation 20:6

But what does that mean to us today? While I believe the passage from John's revelation, quoted above, describes our present state as God's people, many think it describes some future state. But even if it does, that does not mean we should not be living that vocation now. Let's take a little diversion to see how Jesus sees his kingdom during this interim period where he is both present and absent before his return. This is an excerpt from one of Jesus' famous sermons, commonly called "The Sermon on the Mount." This part of the sermon is called "The Beatitudes:"

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.


Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ~ Matthew 5:3-10

“Blessed” is a present tense term – it describes something that is true already – and “shall” is future tense – describing something that is yet to come, something to be anticipated. This little poem is primarily about two things:

1. This kingdom Jesus is talking about does not look like anything these people have ever seen before.
2. It is underway now and something even better is coming.

We will talk more about the crazy, upside-down kingdom that Jesus is describing in the “what” section. But it is important that we understand this now-and-not-yet quality of the kingdom in order for us to fully understand the “why.” Jesus is ushering in a kingdom, but it will be not only populated but RULED by the meek, the mourner, the persecuted, the humble servant, and the poor in spirit. This began 2,000 years ago and bursts afresh on the world every time someone chooses to turn around and follow Jesus.

 How do these qualities compare with what the world teaches as “desirable” or “successful?”



Jeremiah, in chapter 12, asks God, “Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?” Who is right, Jesus or Jeremiah? Why?

So you are to seek after things that you are taught by the world to avoid, and you are told to anticipate blessings that seem contrary to your experience. If this is the “what” we are to seek after, the usual “why” ideas (power, wealth, sex, fame, etc.) and the usual “how” methods (greed, ambition, violence, aggression, etc.) just aren’t gonna cut it. This is why we need to really understand the “why” in order to grow as Christ followers. If we don’t, the first time we are challenged or face a crisis, everything falls apart, and the world’s motivations and methods are just waiting to fill the void left by your foundationless faith. So we need to have the why – our ultimate hope – firmly in hand.

If we are to be blessed now and anticipate some future blessing as well, as promised in the beatitudes, we should anticipate now our future status as rulers and priests alongside Jesus, and we are promised blessing from this vocation.



Being rulers and priests of God might sound kinda cool, but what is the downside?



Is this vocation a new idea to you? If so, how might this change the way you live?

Apparently, we are not to rule as despots and dictators, meting out punishment and reward, or to interpret and enforce the law like the Pharisees did, but if not, what should our vocation as rulers and priests look like?

It begins with the re-assertion of the vocation issued first to Adam in the garden – that of steward, reigning

over creation, as described in LOVE 101 – returning to God’s rightly ordered dominion. Then we must free the role of priest from its attachment to law-giving and its dependence on a line of ancestral succession, reassigning it instead to all believers.

This ties Jesus’ new kingdom to the whole of human history by re-ascribing the great vocation of priest and king to the citizens of this new kingdom, the chief responsibility of both roles being to **fulfill mankind’s history** (past), **reflect mankind’s identity** (present), and **predict mankind’s destiny** (future).

But you don’t have to take my word for it. We find evidence of this renewed vocation all through Jesus’ earthly ministry and the teaching of the early church.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. ~ Romans 12:1

This constitutes a call to priestly service. Who offered the sacrifices in the temple? The priests. But now we are the temple (living stones, see below) and the priests and we’re called to offer our *whole lives* as priestly sacrifices.

*...you also, like living stones, are **being built** into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ...But you are a **chosen** people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who **called** you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

~ 1 Peter 2:5 & 9

So you are “being built,” are “chosen,” and are “called,” to this vocation as a “royal priesthood.” Wow. So we need to reconcile how we can be all these things and still be meek, humble, and peaceful. If we really rule the world, how can we stay humble?

Then, to further muddy the waters, in the same sermon where Jesus promises blessing to the meek, he introduces another complicated idea...

*Be **perfect**, therefore, as your heavenly Father is **perfect**. ~ Matthew 5:48b*

Perfect. There’s a word we find uncomfortable. And this is the exact same word used in the story of the rich young man. When the rich young man asks Jesus what he still lacks, Jesus explains how he can be “perfect.”

This word, is translated “perfect” from the original Greek, *teleios* (pronounced TEH-lay-oss) which, rather than our common definition of “perfect” (in our context, probably “sin-free” or “righteous” or maybe “flawless”), actually means “complete” or “whole.” And in *this* context – the context of Jesus speaking to his new followers – *teleios* means becoming fully human.



What do you think that means - to be “whole” or “complete” or “fully human?”

It is this “becoming” that makes up the “how” that we will cover in the next segment (GROW 102). But what we have now is this: There may be many reasons we seek to behave as Christians, but the chief reason should be our calling to a great vocation – the vocation of man from the beginning of time – to reign alongside the Father as holy rulers and priests, but to do so in a way that seems contrary to our experience – sacrificing ourselves in service and worship – and to do so in anticipation of a time when we will literally rule alongside him in the new heaven and the new earth. This is our hope. This is our call. This is our “why.”

SO FAR:

We are C _____ to a great V _____ .

We are to be R _____ and P _____ , but still

M _____ , H _____ , and P _____

We are B _____ , C _____ , and C _____ .

To be P _____ is to be fully H _____ .