

Grow Pt. 1 – The Way Up is Down

John 13
Spence Shelton
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Member Night & Introduction to Scott & Jessica Urbanek

When we planted Mercy Church last fall it was under the simple mission to make disciples who love God, Love Each Other, and Love our World. That meant bringing a team of people to come in and reach into various sections of our city. One of those sections is our college community. And right now our college campuses are an incredible mission field just waiting on us. There are as many college students here in Charlotte as in RDU and yet the efforts to reach these students are small and under-resourced. I truly believe our college campuses are a white-ripe harvest field that we just need to take a little bit of intentionality with.

Recognizing we needed help to really do this, I made a call to my good friend who is the college pastor at our sending church in Raleigh Durham. He told me about a guy from Miami who had been on his team for a couple of years who was crushing it leading a team who was reaching UNC-

Chapel Hill's campus. That guy was Scott Urbanek. So I met up with Scott and presented him with the vision of not just reaching one campus, but an entire metro area full of campuses. After a lot of prayer on their end and on ours, and after a lot of assessment and an extended interview process, we are so excited to tell you Scott and Jessica moved Friday to Charlotte to join the Mercy Family and Scott will be our first ever College & Missions Director starting July 1.

We'll introduce them more to you on Member Night Tuesday night. But we are glad they are here and wanted you to see their faces. Yes, this is our second Jessica and their daughter's names are Kaylenn & Ellie. So, they should fit right in here.

John 13.1-20¹

Grow Series –

Welcome to summertime at Mercy Church. Today we embark on a fantastically simple summer series together. We are calling the series *GROW* and here is the idea:

¹ There are some passages, like John 13, where wisdom behooves you to stand on the shoulders of those who've come before you. I commend to you John Piper's message on this passage titled "For his sake and your joy, go low." The structure for explaining this chapter was inspired by Piper's magnificent treatment of this passage.

One of the most ordinary parts of life is growing. Kids grow, weeds grow, bills grow, eventually ear hair grows, friendship grows, animals grow, job description grows, and salary grows. Growing is a part of life and in many cases it happens without any thought on our end. Did any of your parents have “the door?” You know, the one that measured your height as you grew? Mine did. Eventually my younger brother hit 6’5” and we were like...mark yourself. I can’t wait to buy a house so we can start our door.

Growing is a process. Give the kid food, he grows. It’s like a formula. Put in the right ingredients and you’ll grow. And this is true in many areas of our lives right?

Most people *desire* to grow in some way in some area of their lives. There is a desire built in all of us to be a better version of our current selves.

- That’s why Crossfit, Orange Theory, and **Insanity** so on exist. They are built around the desire to grow...well actually to shrink usually...but to become a healthier version of yourself.
- We want to grow in our love lives and marriages. The most popular book THIS week in the self-help category on amazon is the **5 Love Languages**. That book was written in 1992 and has sold more copies every year than it did the year before. We want to grow.
- There are some weird ones too right. Yesterday Courtney and I toured a house because we are house

shopping right now. And the only thing on the coffee table was this: **“becoming a supple leopard”**

I just never would put those two words together but this thing is in its 2nd edition! And you know where I’m going with this there are a ll kinds of how-to-grow-spiritually books out there. It's bananas.

- You think I’m going to put some of those books up here to make fun of them, but I’m worried some of you have read them and I don’t want to make things awkward here at the outset so not going to happen.

But here’s the thing I want to be clear on at the outset. According to the bible you are either growing closer to God or you are drifting away from him. There is no idling in the Christian life. And my concern is that a great many people in our city have slipped into a false belief that they can put their spiritual lives on cruise control for the next 30-50 years because they had some spiritual high moment and believe the spiritual part of their life just kind of “paused” right there and they can return and hit play & pick up where they left off. Not true! You are either growing closer to God or drifting from him. Jesus is going to use the metaphor over the next 6 weeks that you are like a branch and he is like a vine. A branch is either growing & bearing fruit, or it’s dying. And that’s how he looks at you.

Now the great news is...growing closer to God is not intended to be complex. We make it out to be, which is why

we are doing this series. To attempt to strip away all the voices, methods, and self-help gurus and just look at what Jesus said about growing closer to God. And our hope is, over the next several weeks you will begin to see, and even takes some steps, to begin a life that consistently grows closer to God and bears much good fruit.

To do that we are going to spend several weeks in the gospel of John together. There are 2 things you can do to make the most of your summer here with us at Mercy ok:

1. **Read the gospel of John.** Together as a church we are going to read John over the next 6 weeks. And I want you to do it. Here's why. If you want to grow closer to God, his word is going to be like food for your soul to help you grow. But I know if you've tried reading the Bible before it can get confusing. So, read it with us as we all read it together. I'll be explaining some parts of it and you'll be able to talk with your community group as well. You can find a reading plan online at mercycharlotte.com/readjohn.

2. **Commit to be here for the entire series.** A lot of people want to grow closer to God but their 'renewed commitment' lasts about as long as their January 1 workout commitment lasts. We are going to be in this series for about 6 weeks. Dive in for 6 weeks. You say "but my summer plans!" Yeah me too. When you are in town... be here. Last year we asked you for 6 weeks and many of you are here 9 months later. Because sticking with it has paid off!

Over the next several weeks together we are going to be looking at the last meal Jesus had with his disciples. After 3 years with them teaching and training them, here in this last meal he shares such rich, deep words about how they would *grow* into the first church. How they would grow from 12 blue collar pansies into some of the greatest figures in church and world history...the 12 apostles. We are going to pick up in John 13 because it is here where the conversation gets personal between Jesus and his guys. If you want to know what Jesus is saying to you about how you follow him...its right here. No self-help books needed. It's all here. Ready? I'm ready. Oh and yes we are covering all of John 13 today.

[1] Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

This is the hour. Jesus has been with his disciples for three years and tomorrow he's going to the cross. He knows this. He knows the time has come. And our author John is pulling us as his readers aside and telling us this is the moment where things are about to change. Jesus loved his own and John, in a little editorial moment he's looking back on this years later and saying he *loved* them to the end. When he got up on that cross...it was his LOVE for them that put him up there. John is saying do not forget that everything Jesus did, he did because of his *love* for them. And his *love* for you.

That's the context of John's gospel. What Jesus does, he does out of a deep love for you.

Now I want to show you the last verse in our passage today. It's verse 20. We'll hit the verses after it but 21-38 really recap & reinforce 1-20. Look at verse 20:

[20] Truly, truly, (This means listen up. Pay attention. This is a big deal. This is the point) I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me."

What he's saying here is that the disciples are the ones he is preparing to send out into the world. And whoever receives these disciples...whoever receives the gospel message they proclaim...are receiving Jesus. Which means these disciples are now the representatives of Jesus on earth. Jesus is leaving...TOMORROW. And now these guys will be his reps. So since they are going out under his banner, he is telling them what their lives should look like. If you are really a branch, extending out from me, this is what you will look like.

Ok now I'm going to walk you through the scene in John 13 and we are going to see a surface level meaning of this passage and then a deeper meaning.

I'm going to give you the surface level meaning because it won't surprise some of you. We are going to build this idea as we walk through the story the first time through. And

you'll see it coming but the passage is so rich with so much I want you to see where we are heading:

Growing Christians will joyfully lay down their lives to serve others

You ready?

[2] During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, [3] Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God,

Verses 2 – 3 are John's way of setting you up for what is about to happen. See Jesus knew Judas was going to betray him. We'll see that more in a minute. And I want you to see what John says about Jesus. Because to fully grasp the absurdity of what Jesus does next you need verse 3. God had entrusted ALL things....The whole universe...to him! Not only was he in charge of the universe, Jesus was the son of GOD...not only that, in fact he was God himself. John is pulling back the curtain for his readers on a seemingly underwhelming scene. Jesus had full knowledge (past present & future) and complete power. Basically...Jesus is a BIG DEAL. He's the Son of God & ruler of the universe. He is the most important person ever. Worthy of more honor than anyone on earth. I know LeBron just did the unthinkable...coming back from down 3-1 to win the NBA finals and now his legacy is cemented. But that doesn't really compare with the ability to create worlds. Jesus is,

according to scripture, THE high ruling king over all. Now watch what he does...

[4] rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. [5] Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

What did the high-ranking king worthy of honor do? He took off his robe (think a king laying aside his cloak) and put a towel around his waist like a busboy. Then got down on his knees and did the unthinkable. He did the work of a servant. A low-ranking servant at that. Because feet were nasty back then. Some of you got stinky feet... when your socks come off it smells like boiled eggs & fish. But that's nothing on the grime these guys had on their feet from walking everywhere often barefoot. Why is he subjecting himself to this? Here's why:

Verse 12

[12] When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? [13] You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am.

Jesus says you are right that I am in a place of higher standing than you. I am over you. You get it. You don't fully get it but you at least put me in a position of authority over you to some degree. By all ordinary standards, Jesus should be the one *being served* in this scene.

[14] If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. [15] For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. [16] Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.

Why did I do this? I did this as an example for you. If I, the guy who is greater than you, humble myself down to wash your stinky feet, you as the lesser ones should willingly follow my lead. Do as I do. You ought to wash one another's feet just as I have done to you. Because verse 16...Truly Truly (there's that phrase again): The servant (you) is not greater than the master (Jesus) and...going back to our big overarching idea today: the messenger (you) is not greater than the one who sent him (Jesus).

He's describing the type of person is qualified to represent him. You disciples are going out with my words, my spirit...and your fit-ness for this role is being the kind of people who gladly lower themselves for the sake of propping others up. Who sacrifice themselves for the exaltation of others. These are people who go against the worldly expectation of your rank. The world says those in higher positions are to be served by the ones in lower positions. And the sign of "growth" or success in this world is having people serving you. And Jesus flips this upside down and says the one who is exalted...Jesus...is the servant. The Christian...who has the highest standing in the

universe...think about it...in Christ you've been called son or daughter of GOD. You are a co-heir with Christ. You are exalted... It's the highest calling in the universe. Your purpose in life is to be a messenger sent out by Jesus and what does that messenger do? SERVES others. Growing Christians will lay down their lives. Their standing as exalted ones with Jesus will compel them to lay down their lives like Jesus.

Are you a servant!? Regardless of your position in life. Whether you are a busboy, a sales rep, a spouse, a parent, a manager, an older friend, or a president...are you a servant? Is your mindset in the use of your place at home, in church community, or work to serve people? Is it to prop them up OR is it to stand over them and feed off of their approval of you and submission to you?

I have a friend who left his High Level 6 figure job at SAS to be a missionary to the poor people of Indonesia a few years ago. He went from overseeing 100s of college educated upwardly mobile professionals to serving orphans & widows. People don't do that! But Christians can. They are following the example of Christ and lowering themselves for the good of others.

Candid moment this week: Am I serving you? Or am I using your approval & your presence to stoke my ego? Hopefully my teaching of God's word has some measure of serving you...but you can't see my heart. You can't know if I am serving you to feed off of your praise or if I am so captured

by the service of Christ to me that I am, in some measure, genuinely seeking to humble myself and pour myself out in hopes of building you up. Building your faith. I found a mix of that this week in my heart. I genuinely want to serve you. I love you church. **But I must guard my heart against pride that masquerades as humility.** I want Mercy to be a place where we joyfully serve one another and that starts with me.

And there's a very important word in that main idea for today I want to draw you back to (**highlight joyfully using yellow font**):

Growing Christians will joyfully lay down their lives to serve others

Joyfully serving others. Where is this word joyfully coming from? Because it is a HUGELY important word in this idea because without it you can still serve people but you can do so begrudgingly. You can gripe, complain, and be frustrated AS you serve. How many times have we done that? Men, how many times have you exhaled...gotten off the couch and begrudgingly helped out with the chores? Or the kids? How many times have you scowled your way through helping someone move? When that happens, you are missing it! Serving others is not a JOB, it's a JOY! Where does that come from?

Verse 17: **[17] If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.**

Blessed are you if you do them. *Makarios*. "Happy, joyful, satisfied, contented." Blessed. You experience deep soul level joy and happiness when the gospel of Christ overflows out of you into service of others.

This is completely counter-intuitive to the mind of this world. The world thinks happiness comes from being served. Nobody needs to be convinced of that. Sip umbrella drinks on a white sand beach while people play ukuleles and fan me with palm leaves. That's happiness. Right? WRONG! The world is wrong! And your own worldly nature is wrong.

But joy doesn't come that way. No just fleeting pleasure comes that way. In our worldly nature it is pleasant to be served. But it isn't awesomely satisfying. It isn't deep. It's temporary.

That's why in Acts 20.35 – "it is more blessed to give than to receive." Where did he say that? John Piper in a great sermon on this passage said: right here in John 13.

The measure at which you understand the gospel is visible not just in whether you serve, but in *how* you serve.

Here's a question for you: When you serve others is it a job or a joy?

If you are going to be his representative you must GLADLY lay down your life in service of others.

One more thing on this surface level. As Jesus is talking he points out that there is a problem in the room. That problem's name is Judas.

[18] I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, 'He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.' [19] I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he.

For those of you newer to the bible, one of the disciples is a guy named Judas. Remember he came up in verse 2. You've probably heard his name even if you've never opened your bible. Now when you read the gospel of John with us you'll learn a little more about him but this really is his main scene. Verses 21-30, that I'm not going to put up here, retell how it happened but the gist is this. Judas, one of Jesus' own, was offered 30 pieces of silver (about \$7500) to betray Jesus and give him over to his enemies. And Judas agrees to the bargain.

And this is why he must go. He cannot be one of Jesus' messengers. Because by doing this he is seeking to exalt himself at the expense of another. He's the anti-gospel. I'm going to *use* others to improve my own lot. In this case, for some money. Not \$5, but not a whole lot either. Judas thinks the way up is to push others down. Jesus says the way up is to push others up.

Oh, and Jesus says...look at verse 19...in case you needed another reminder

[19] I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he.

The reason I am telling you about the betrayal that's about to happen is so that when it happens you'll realize I already knew it and that will help you to believe something. And the actual Greek just says you will believe that "I AM." It doesn't include the 'he.' The 'he' is fine, but the I AM is significant. I AM who? Jesus is claiming a name reserved ONLY for God himself in the Old Testament.

Ex 3.14 – God tells Moses to go to Egypt, walk up to Pharaoh and say, "Pharaoh, Pharaoh, Ohhhh Pharaoh let my people go...." And Moses says I'm just a shepherd now. Who should I say sent me? God says you tell them "I AM."

The function of these two verses is to say when he laid down his life...he laid down divinity. Philippians 2 we read last week. Though he was in the form of God...did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped...he laid it down. To come here.

And Jesus is reminding them...guys...I AM is the one doing this now. I AM GOD. And I am laying down my life for your benefit. So you should joyfully lay down your life in service to others. This is the Christian life. This is it!

And near the end of the chapter Jesus connects back with the idea that we are messengers. He says the way we serve each other is how the message will be validated.

[34] A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. [35] By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Francis Schaeffer was one of the great Christian philosophers of last century. Seriously considered one of the greats. He gave his life to the study of defending Christianity by developing strong answers to tough questions from skeptics. But then reflecting on this section of John we are reading he said

*"But after we have done our best to communicate to a lost world, still we must never forget that the final apologetic which Jesus gave is the observable love of true Christians for true Christians."*²

He's saying the credibility of the message will be based on how the messengers care for one another. They may preach the gospel, but do they look like it? Because the way people will actually see the true Jesus is through the joyful love of Christians for one another. That "love" is what he's talking

² Schaeffer, Francis. *The mark of a Christian* (Downers Grove, IL IVP 1970) 29.

about up in verses 1-20. Serving joyfully like Christ! Are you a joyful servant? One more time:

Growing Christians will *joyfully* lay down their lives to serve others

That's the Surface level meaning of this passage and it is deeply important for you and for our church.

But I told you there was a deeper meaning. And you who have been sitting with your bibles open notice that I skipped some verses. Lets meet our other character. Peter

[6] He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" [7] Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." [8] Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." [9] Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!"

I love Peter. Peter is an all-in guy. As you read John over these next few weeks you'll meet Peter a good bit. He is like the head lifeguard of the disciples. So when Jesus starts to try and wash his feet Peter in verse 8 is like WHOA...you shouldn't do that! You are Jesus! My Lord cannot wash my feet. I should wash his.

And if the only point of this passage was for Jesus to be an example to us to wash one another's feet...to serve

others...If there was no other meaning than that...Jesus could have just said

"Peter...I'm trying to make a point here...and you are ruining it. This is an illustration, it was going well. Will you just shut up and let me wash your feet?"

But he doesn't. Instead look how Jesus responds

Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me."

Jesus got pretty serious. All of the sudden Peter's eternity is on the line. If he doesn't let Jesus do this then he is in same boat with Judas. I thought this was just a foot washing thing and then. Did you really have to go there, Jesus?

Naturally Peter, the eager beaver he is, says ALL OF ME THEN! I'm in!

And Jesus' response gets deep ok. I want you to wade into this deep water because there is great truth here. Here we go...

[10] Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." [11] For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean."

There are 11 clean guys and 1 dirty guy in this room. That “you” are clean is plural. That’s y’all. But not all y’all. Just y’all. Because one guy is dirty. He’s not clean. That’s Judas. But Peter is clean....

I want to acknowledge something you’ve likely caught onto by now. Bathing is a metaphor. There is much, much more being said here than an illustration on humility. Bathing is a metaphor for salvation. Jesus is saying you who have received my salvation...you are clean....COMPLETELY clean...cleanliness is a metaphor in scripture for holiness. And Peter is COMPLETELY clean. Even his feet are clean in that sense. COMPLETELY. You are washed you are clean and God says you are mine forever AND NOTHING can change that.

But even though you are clean...you still need Jesus to wash your feet. Why?

Because those who are forgiven, or clean, still have sin in their lives. They aren’t perfect. Even though they are clean, they still mess up. They still rebel, still disobey God at times. This is 1 John 1.8-9

[8] If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. [9] If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to *cleanse* us from all unrighteousness.

This is incredibly important. What Peter needed to see is that even though he is completely clean, completely

justified in Christ...his daily sin still needed to be dealt with. Peter’s sin didn’t take away his eternal life but it HAD to be dealt with.

See guys, the foot washing of the disciples is a picture of our need for the ongoing daily application of the gospel. That the children of God who are totally clean in 100% right standing with God...need to approach each day aware of their sin and in desperate need of the grace of Jesus.

And this is why Jesus HAS to wash Peter’s feet. Because if you don’t need the daily application of his once-and-for-all cleansing...Jesus says “YOU HAVE NO SHARE WITH ME.”

Jesus is saying, “I can’t have any perfectionists out there Peter!” I can’t have people who leverage religion to act all high and mighty like they only needed my grace to get into my kingdom. No that is Phariseeism. That is not Christianity. That is religious piety but it isn’t Christianity.

The deeper meaning of this passage: **Growing Christians never grow beyond the gospel.**

To grow as a Christian is to see more and more how depraved you are. How prone to sin you are...and at the same time how much you’ve been loved. How God laid down his life to serve you. To take away your sin. To cleanse you. And you have it once-for-all, and need it every day.

This is how the growing Christian serves others with humility. You aren't better than anyone. Truthfully you become more aware than most of how messed up you really are. And so serving others becomes a joyful reenactment of the very thing you experience that day. Washing the feet of others comes after daily surrendering your pride, confessing your sin, and letting Jesus wash your feet. When you do, you become a joyful person.

Growing Christians joyfully lay down their lives to serve others...because they never grow beyond the gospel.

Are you a joyful servant? If not...have you made your home in the gospel yet? Were you there today? Today did you contemplate the magnitude of what Christ did for you?

Fitting we are taking communion together today. Because that was the meal Jesus was having with his disciples on this night....

Transition into Communion.