

"God-Saturated Growth"
(Psalm 119:33-40)
Pastor Peter Yi
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³³ Teach me, Lord, the way of your decrees,
that I may follow it to the end.
³⁴ Give me understanding, so that I may keep your law
and obey it with all my heart.
³⁵ Direct me in the path of your commands,
for there I find delight.
³⁶ Turn my heart toward your statutes
and not toward selfish gain.
³⁷ Turn my eyes away from worthless things;
preserve my life according to your word.
³⁸ Fulfill your promise to your servant,
so that you may be feared.
³⁹ Take away the disgrace I dread,
for your laws are good.
⁴⁰ How I long for your precepts!
In your righteousness preserve my life.

When a person becomes a Christian he or she has two goals that serve an ultimate goal. The two goals are: first, to grow to become more like Jesus Christ. It's to grow in holiness. It's to hate sin more, sin less and to begin loving obedience to God, and obey God more. That's the first goal. The second goal is to participate in the mission of Christ. So if the first goal is to become more like Christ, the second goal is to do what Christ would want us to do. What is his mission? It's to reach the nations with the gospel of Jesus Christ. It's to tell anyone who would listen, that God loves them so much that he gave his one and only Son to die for them and whoever believes in his Son, will not perish, will not be judged by God, but will spend eternity with God. That's the twofold goal of every single person who calls themselves Christian.

Those two goals serve an ultimate goal. What's the ultimate goal? It's the same goal for which God created the universe. It's the same goal for which he redeemed sinful humanity. We can say, that God does all that he does for his glory, to bring glory and honor to himself. So what then is our ultimate goal, especially, as Christians? It's to bring glory to God in everything.

This is what it means to grow as a Christian, this is what it means to be a disciple. Now, here's a little tidbit that I learned last week while I was in Cancun, attending our denominational meeting. Yes I know, the job is tough, but someone's gotta do it. I learned from another pastor that the word Christian appears only 3 times in the New Testament. I was quite surprised. I was even more surprised when I learned that the word disciple is used 300 times in the New Testament. 3 verses 300. That statistic is pretty revealing on what it means to be a Christian, isn't it? If you're not following Jesus, if you're not a disciple, you're not a Christian.

Well, this passage speaks about all these things. I'm going to focus on three things.

This passage tells us Something about Christians, Something about prayer, and Something about spiritual growth. (repeat)

First, this psalm teaches us something about what a Christian is. The psalmist, the person writing these words, is a Christian and his heart has been changed by God. That's what a Christian is...a Christian is a person whose heart has been changed by God. These words in this section of Psalm 119, is something that only a Christian could actually say and truly mean it. How do I come to that conclusion? Well, how do we, even now, know if we ourselves, or the person sitting next to us, are Christian? There are several tests that the bible gives and one of them is to look at the heart. What does that mean? It's different from looking at the behavior. Looking at the behavior is one way for us to know if a person is a Christian or not. But in this passage it shows us the heart of a Christian person. The heart reveals a person's true motivations. It shows us what he or she really desires.

Take a look at the second part of verse 33. It says, "that I may follow it to the end." The tail end of verse 34 says, so that I may keep your law, and obey it will all my heart." Verse 35 goes deeper still: "for there I find delight." Verse 36 says, "Turn my heart toward your statues *and not toward selfish gain*." Verse 38 ends with the words, "So that you may be feared." And finally in verse 39 he confesses that God's laws are good.

When we put all those things together, it paints us a picture of the heart, the attitude, the desires of a person who has been changed by God. It's a description of a Christian person.

More specifically we see a person who desires to obey God. We find a person who wants to find delight, joy, and happiness in keeping the commands of God. His heart's desire is to follow God's laws to the very end of his life. It's not a momentary fleeting thought, rather he wants to obey God until he dies. He also wants to live in fear/holy reverence to God. And then he says that God's laws are good.

Now, I don't know about you, but keeping God's commands is very hard, almost impossibly difficult. Before I became a Christian I could say that I had these two sentiments about obeying God. First I could care less about obeying him. I had no desire to obey him. God was an annoying intrusion, a bother. And secondly, I was afraid of him. Because I knew my life was not pleasing to him, I was afraid that God would harm me, curse me. But after becoming a Christian, I experienced all of those heart changes, changes I knew I didn't create, but a change that God had done to me.

Friends, when we read a passage like this, it always begs us to examine ourselves. It forces us to look deep within. Has there been a heart change in you? Do you now love what you once hated? Before the word of God condemned you, so you hated it, and you hated God; but now, that same word of God frees you, releases you and you love it, and thus you also love God. Are there now new convictions that were not there before? The old conviction was, I live for me. The new conviction is "I will follow you...to the end, I will obey God with all my heart." That's what a Christian is.

If you think yes, yes, I have that, I've experienced that and it was because I, myself, determined to change my heart, and to change my attitude. It was like an acquired taste like certain foods. At first, I didn't much like sushi, but after eating it over and over again, I gained the taste for it. If that's what your experience was like, you're not a Christian. Christianity is not acquired. We don't just force ourselves to read the bible. We don't merely force ourselves to sit here and listen to a man speak hoping it'll grow on us. It's not acquired. For a Christian, if you truly are one, you love the word, you love God, you love the people of God, you love holiness, you love the worship of God, because God himself gave you a new heart, God himself made you alive. This is what it means to be a Christian.

A person who is not a Christian could not have written and asked the things that this psalmist had asked. So that's the first thing.

This passage also teaches us something about prayer.

Each verse begins with an imperative verb, a command verb, a 'do this' verb. Teach me, Give me, Direct me, Turn me, Fulfill in me, Take away from me. What is utterly unbelievable about this psalm is the boldness, almost shamelessness we see in his prayer. Give me, do this, do that. Who is this psalmist to have the audacity to command God to this or that for him? Who talks like that way? Mothers, any ideas? Who do you know that says, give me this, do this, do that?

Only a child could get away with this. It doesn't matter what title you have at work or outside the home—it could be captain, manager, boss, chef, even prime minister... It makes no difference what your title is. It doesn't matter how many degrees you possess. It doesn't matter how much money is in your bank account, for at home you're just dad, you're just mom. So if junior calls out in the middle of the night, "Give me a glass of water," you get up and get junior a glass of water. Only the child of a king can command a king to this or do that.

Likewise, only the child of God can pray such confident prayers to his beloved heavenly Father. Father, teach me, give me, direct me, turn me and so on. And so this is how we too can pray. And God will answer.

The other thing we notice about his prayers are their 'godwardness.' When the psalmist asks God to do this thing or to do that thing in his life, he completes the request with a "so that" statement. Take a look:

- 119:33 Teach me, Lord, the way of your decrees,
that I may follow it to the end.
- 34 Give me understanding, so that I may keep your law
and obey it with all my heart.
- 38 Fulfill your promise to your servant,
so that you may be feared.

What we can learn from this is, not only do the things we pray for reveal what's truly in our hearts, but the reason for why we ask for these things, reveals to us even more clearly our heart's desires.

Here's what I'm getting at. All of us pray to God asking him to give us something or to do something for us. These things reveal something about our hearts. It may even expose our idols. If you're always praying about academics or getting a boyfriend or girlfriend or about money, it may reveal your true desires, it may even reveal our idols. Now, what the psalmist teaches us is this. Do our prayers, do the things that we are asking, have the follow up part...the "so that" part? Whether we say that phrase or not, it's implied in our hearts. So, I'm not saying that every single thing that we pray has to have a "So that" clause, but what I am saying is that every single thing we pray implies a "so that" clause. Our prayers come from the heart, and what we pray and how we pray reveals the motivation for why we pray it. Okay, I don't want this to get too complicated. Let me summarize it like this. When we pray our prayers, when we ask things of God, what is our "so that" clause?

- Help me do well in school....so that...
- Help me love and serve my difficult boss at work...so that...
- Help me with my financial situation...so that...
- Help me obey mom and dad...so that...
- Help me to fight off this particular temptation...so that...

It's these 'so that' clauses that reveal our true motivations, it shows us what's in our hearts.

What then is the overarching “so that” clause for Christians? It can be stated in several different ways:

- “so that whether I eat or drink or whatever I do I would bring glory to you, God.”
- “so that I may find my deepest joy and satisfaction in you, God.”
- “so that I would become more holy and bring glory to you, God.”
- “so that others would look at my life and give praise to you, God.”
- “so that whether I live or die, I may gain you, Jesus.”

Those are some of the ways the bible explains the “so that” statement.

Parents, your prayers at this season of your life might be all about little Johnny, what will your “so that” clause be? Singles, you might be praying about your career, what will be your “so that” clause? Young people, what about you?

When we start doing this, here’s what I think will begin to happen. The very thing we are praying for, will begin to change. How so? They will begin to become much more about God and less and less about us. It’ll be much less about what we want and much more about what God wants for us. I’m not saying that there is something wrong with personal prayers about our personal needs and requests. Just from reading this psalm, we could never come to that conclusion. All his prayers are intensely personal. However, they are personal with a very clear godwardness about them. That’s how our prayers can be. So tonight or tomorrow, when you pray for yourself, or for your kids, or for your pastor, or for your friend, go ahead and add the Godward “so that” statement.

We’ve learned about what it means to be a Christian. We’ve learned a couple things about prayer. **Finally, in this passage we learn something about spiritual growth.** Here’s what we learn. Apart from a desperate dependence upon God, we as Christians, cannot grow. Again, let me invite you to look at the text:

- 33. Teach me Lord, the way of your decrees.
- 34. Give me understanding in regards to your law.
- 35. Direct me in the path of your commands.
- 36. Turn my heart toward your statutes.
- 37. Turn my eyes away from worthless things.
Preserve my life according to your word.
- 38. Fulfill your promise to your servant.
- 39. Take away the disgrace I dread.
- 40. Preserve my life.

Here’s how the famous 19th century British pastor Charles Spurgeon says it.

“Child like, blessed words, from the lips of an old, experienced believer, and he a king, and a man inspired of God. ...The Psalmist will have the Lord for his teacher; for he feels that his heart will not learn [from] any lesser instructor. ...What condescension it is on our great Jehovah’s part that he deigns to teach those who seek him. The lesson which is desired is thoroughly practical; the holy man would not only learn the *statutes*, but the *way* of them, the daily use of them, their tenor, spirit, direction, habit, tendency. He would know that path of holiness which is hedged in by divine law, along which the commands of the Lord stand as sign posts of direction and mile stones of information, guiding and marking our progress. The very desire to learn this way is in itself an assurance that we shall be taught therein, for he who made us long to learn will be sure to gratify the desire.” (Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*)

Why is this dependence upon the Lord necessary? The reason is because all spiritual growth, true spiritual growth is a work of God. Unless God is working, we're not changing. Spiritual growth is not merely a matter of who tries the hardest, but rather, the one who depends on God the best.

¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.
(1 Cor 15:10)

And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. (2 Cor 9:8)

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Eph 2:10)

¹² Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.
(Phil 2:12–13)

I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow.
(1 Cor 3:6 NIV11-GK)

These verses all show us that it is God who works in us to cause us to spiritually grow. If that is truly the case, what does that mean for us? It means we must with great desperation and dependence, ask God to help us to know, understand and obey his holy word. We need to ask God for our hearts to be changed to love his word. We need to desperately rely on God for our growth.

Just this past week I received an email from a former youth group student, who's now an old friend and colleague in pastoral ministry. Here's what he wrote:

Hey Peter,

Just a word of encouragement for you as you continue to serve God. I don't know if you remember giving me advice about my smoking habit? You told me to stop worrying about the sin and to focus on my relationship with Jesus. I wanted you to know that I live by that my principle even to this day and that was the reason why I went to go on the personal fasting retreat and eventually did quit, but it wasn't because I was strong enough but because Jesus changed me. You know that was the summer before I started at Tyndale.

I'm not sure if I ever told you that you helped me to do that.

Thanks for building into me so that I can build into others.

That's the key to growth. It's focusing on Christ. It's relying on Christ. It's receiving the help of Christ. Think of the area in your life in which you want to grow: kicking a sin habit; growing in a certain character; defeating anger or pride; become a better evangelist or teacher; growing as a worshiper. Whatever it is, how are you going about it? What's your method? Trying harder? Or, depending harder? As we depend on Christ, as we rely on his gospel, we begin to change, we begin to receive the power, but not only the power, we enter the correct path of genuine spiritual growth.

Just take for example growing in holiness, overcoming a besetting sin. It is really a matter of trying harder? But we have tried and it hasn't really worked. No, we throw ourselves down before the Lord and cry out for his help. That's how we grow.

Friends, in Christ, in the gospel, all these things occur. In the gospel we become Christians with new, changed hearts. In the gospel we can boldly and confidently go to God in prayer as his dearly loved children. And in the gospel, we can lean on Jesus, to cause us to change from the inside out.

Let's pray.