

Sunday August 7, 2022  
First Lesson: Hebrews 11: 1-3, 8-16  
Gospel Lesson: Luke 12: 32-40  
Sermon Series: Growth Effect  
Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel

**We are continuing with our sermon series called “The Growth Effect.” This is a series designed to examine the progress that we have made as a result of our many weeks spent on both the Pruning Effect and Spiritual fruit Effect sermon series.**

- So the immediate question that comes to my mind, that I think is worth exploring together; when looking at our two lessons today, is the question of, “What do we do when growth stalls?”
- What is our response when growth becomes stagnant?
- Another way of asking this question is, “What do we do when it seems that our situation is not improving?”

- What do we do in times, **where our** health is not improving, **when there is no** progress in finding another job, **when our relationships** have come to an impasse, **when the energy** and excitement of our organizations, churches and more have come to a halt?
- For I stopped by to proclaim that **it is easy** to celebrate when growth is evident;
- For example, last Sunday in our own worship community, **growth seemed evident**;
- With six new members, jazz music, a full worship attendance and more; I don't know about you, it felt good to be in this space.
- Even this Sunday, we welcomed another new member....**it's easy to celebrate** growth when we can see it;
- In our personal lives, **it's easy to celebrate growth**, when we have money in the bank, no major drama or catastrophes to really have to

handle or deal with; perhaps some of us are getting those last minute vacations in before school starts; which on a side note, that is usually when I am at my best, is when I am getting ready to go on vacation! Am I alone in that?

- **Suddenly I am** inspired to wake up at 5 am, and even have the nerve to get a light workout in, before packing up our vehicle to get ready to go;
- In fact if I am perfectly honest, every day that I am on vacation, I tend to be energized, alert, waking up before the cock crows;
- But then when it is time to come back to the real world, **suddenly my** energy begins to wane;
- **Suddenly the sun** doesn't seem to shine as bright;
- **Suddenly it is that** much more difficult to celebrate, because sometimes, often times, our lives doesn't always reveal growth, activity, movement and improvement;

- In fact the longer I live, the more I realize that life is more about waiting and planning and anticipating, than it is about doing.
- In fact I am reading this book “The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry, by John Mark Comer; foreword is written by John Orlberg;
- In the foreword Orlberg wrote, “Hurry involves excessive haste or a state of urgency. It is associated with words such as hurl, hurdle, *hurly-burly*( meaning “uproar), and hurricane. He defined it as a ‘state of frantic effort one falls into in response to inadequacy, fear and guilt.”
- But this is the sentence that really changed my life as it pertains to the perceived stagnant times in our lives;
- He said, “All my worst moments....are when I’m in a hurry.” He goes on to say that, “Love, joy, and peace....are incompatible with hurry.”

- To place these thoughts in context with our Growth Effect sermon series, I'd like to pitch my sermonic tent on this idea that I invite us to all lean into and perhaps even wrestle with;
- And that is for us to consider that these growth stalls that sometimes occurs in our lives are actually a blessing, because they can teach us how to grow into these spiritual fruits that we have been talking about out of Galatians 5.
- For it is in these stagnant moments of our lives, that if we learn to be become intentional and purpose filled during these growth lulls; **that we can become** more loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, generous, faithful, <sup>23</sup> gentle, and rooted in self-control.
- For instance if it weren't for the time of isolation that occurred during the beginning of the pandemic, our church community would not have

had the new sound system, media technology and more that we have today.

- But it was during the period of stagnation, that allowed leaders to come together through collaboration and faith, to do what in real time, I am convinced simply would not have happened as quickly— if at all!
- For during that time of isolation, we had to have faith, that if we were to be viable as a Church, it was now or never, to invest in something that the Church desperately needed.
- And this is just one example of how stagnation, which is the opposite of hurry, can really bless us.
- Furthermore, I invite you to keep thinking about those own moments in your lives, where stagnation has actually been a blessing.
- In fact I would coin these moments as simply us **being delayed by design;**

- For I would suggest that sometimes there are things in our lives that need to be delayed for growth to really occur;
- For it is in these moments of delay, where we can study more, reflect more, grow more and prepare more for the work that lies ahead!
- And so how our scriptural texts speak to what I am naming this morning, is by giving us all another important consideration to think about.
- And that is that sometimes when we think there is stagnation, **this does not mean that growth is not still occurring.**
- Take a plant for example; a plant goes through what is a propagation stage, in which there are typically four stages of development to this process; seed, sprout, small plant, and adult plant.
- When the seed gets planted into the soil with water and sun, then it will start to grow into a small sprout.

- When the sprout begins to grow, slightly before this becomes detectable to the naked eye, there are roots that are steadily going deep into the ground.
- At some point in this process, a stem stretches through the soil.
- Then the plant will start to grow leaves towards the sun.
- But here is the point I want us to consider is that when those roots are really forming initially, you and I have really no clue what will come, because **the crucial development of that plant is occurring underneath the soil;**
- In fact, it is important for us not to interfere with this stage, for as the roots are growing deeper, we could kill the plant before it even grows;
- However, just because we cannot see this process happening with the naked eye, **does not mean growth is not occurring;**



- This idea is also being captured in our Hebrews text; the great faith chapter of the Bible; which most scholars will name this to not be the formal definition of faith, mainly because of the word order in the Greek, is designed to reveal certain characteristics of faith.
- And so Hebrews 11:1 opens with a familiar scriptural assurance that *faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*”
- And then the epistle to the Hebrews by Paul goes onto lay out the characteristics of faith shown through the Israelites ancestors of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and so forth.
- When I invited our community of aspiring Biblical scholars from our ***Wednesday Applying the Sermon to Life*** into this conversation, to identify where they see themes of growth potential

occurring in this passage; ( and by the way we now have grown so large as a group, that we have to break up into tables now—that's the growth effect at its finest);

- Anyway, one of the table groups identified how there were many times in their lives, it seemed as **if things were not there for them**; the job that they wanted **wasn't there**, the blessing they were looking for **wasn't there**, even Sarah in the Bible being barren, could fall into this same idea of something we desire and hope for, not being there.
- However, as a result of studying this passage and being a part of these conversations that we have made space for in this worship community, the good news is that this group of people are beginning to see that things are happening...
- That their blessings are there...the blessings are here.

- Along these same lines, one of the testimonies from another of our classmates admitted how they are without work for now, but they recognize that this is only a temporary situation,
- For they trust that in due time, in God's time...**the job will be there.**
- And so this is the essence of this Hebrews passage, to consider that just because you and I cannot see it, or touch it or perhaps even understand the lulls that occur in our lives, **does not mean that growth is not happening.**
- Another class participant described this stagnation process best, to be like in times of baking; when you open the oven as you are baking a cake— it lets heat out.
- Heat as we all know, helps the cake rise.
- Therefore, the more heat you let out the more your cake will not rise properly.

- So this is a long way of naming that sometimes what we are hoping will grow or improve in our lives, just needs a little more time to metaphorically bake so to speak;
- As a lot of folks would say in my first Church context, that sometimes God is just working some things out for us or within us, but the good news, the most important news is that **God is still on the scene... God has never left the scene;**
- **For God can help** make a way out of no way;
- **God can part** the red seas and keep the Earth rotating at the same time;
- **God clothes the lilies** of the field and listens to our prayers simultaneously;
- For there is nothing impossible for God and with God!
- **Therefore, how our gospel of Luke fits into this conversation is that we are essentially**

**given instructions, on what we are to do during these growth stalls.**

- Jesus said that the attitude of the Christian is to be like that of servants who are expecting momentarily the return of their master.
- They must be ready to open to him the moment he knocks at the street door.
- The servants whom the master finds watching will be **blessed**. He will serve them.
- Now in this text the **second watch** which scholars estimate to be (9:00 P.M. to midnight) and the **third** (12:00–3.00 A.M.) are the times when it is hardest to keep fully awake and alert.
- Therefore, the emphasis here is on the unexpectedness of the time of the Second Coming.
- For if a person had known what hour of the night the burglar would break in, that person would be watching for them.

- Therefore, we are to be always on the alert, for Christ will come **in an hour that we aren't expecting** (v. 40).
- **So the million dollar question becomes, how do we stay alert in our stagnation moments?**
- I love what else my new aforementioned book, "The Ruthless Imagination of Hurry," has to say along these lines;
- For the author mentioned that the average iPhone user touches their phone 2,617 times a day;
- Then the author asked the question, "What would my life be like if God touched my mind as frequently as I touch my phone?"
- I would expand on this to ask, "What would our lives be like if we metaphorically touched upon God as frequently as we touch our phones?"
- In these moments of perceived stagnation, if we touched upon God by way of our worship?

- In these stalled moments; if we touched upon God by way of our service?
- You see Church how we stay alert through the first, second and third watch, is we become by way of contrast, like the psalmist of Psalm 16:8 who said, “I have set the Lord always before me.
- And how we set the Lord always before us, is by choosing where the treasure of our heart is and deciding **that it is ultimately with the One who has treasured us first;**
- And how we begin to treasure God is;
- **We keep on** praying,
- **We keep on** seeking,
- **We keep on** trusting,
- **We keep on** learning,
- **We keep on** contributing,
- **We keep on** studying God’s Word,
- **We keep on** listening;
- **We keep on** pursuing,

- **We keep on** loving,
- **We keep on keeping on**, until the adapted words of Isaiah 43:19-21 is made evident;
- That tells us that not only is **God about to do a new thing; God is doing something;**  
now it springs forth; do you not perceive it?...  
**Because it's there....it has always been there!**
- **God will make a way** in the wilderness  
and rivers in the desert....
- **God gives water** in the wilderness, rivers in the desert—
- **God gives drink** to the people, the people whom God formed for God's self, so that they might declare God's praise.
- (Psalm 150)And from this, once we realize how precious of a treasure that God's sovereign love for us really is, this is when we begin to truly  
Praise the Lord!



Praise God in the sanctuary;

praise God in the mighty firmament![\[a\]](#)

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• Praise God for his mighty deeds;

praise her according to her surpassing  
greatness!

• Praise God with trumpet sound;

praise God with lute and harp!

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• Praise the Lord with tambourine and dance;

praise the Creator with strings and pipe!

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• Praise the Waymaker with clanging cymbals;

praise the source of our growth with loud  
clashing cymbals!

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• Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord!

- For the Growth Effect is happening and it is happening now!