

DISCIPLES GROW

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I don't know much about gardening – but I have found that plants that come in a smaller size are generally cheaper than more fully grown ones, and if you get them in the local soil, while they are still small, they adapt better to the special features of Canberra clay. The one thing I am expecting, is that a plant will grow – I need to plant it, and water it – but I am looking for it to grow. I want to give it some good soil, and look after it, but it has a key role, it has to grow.

When I'm buying a new, baby plant I find it really helpful to look at the plastic tag. It tells me the kind of soil this plant enjoys; how much sun it can handle; and most importantly, it has a picture of what a fully grown version looks like.

When we open the letter of 2 Peter, we find a tag for a spiritual plant. We have a picture of what a follower of Jesus will look like as they grow up. I wonder how you feel about the expectation that all Christians need to grow up?

Being told to “grow up” is not a phrase we like to be on the receiving end of. It is something that is said to immature and silly people – “act your age” is another version of it. As adults we usually like to think that we are grown up; we are mature. It can be a tough thing to hear God's word, in 2 Peter, tell us that we still have growing to do. And that's the problem with thinking that being a follower of Jesus is like growing from being a kid to an adult – because after a while you stop growing taller, you don't need a bigger size of shoes – the same size as last time will be fine – you stop growing.

But followers of Jesus, Peter says in chapter 1, will never stop growing – you are more like a plant – there will always be growing to do, because some bits will be pruned and chopped back, so that you will grow better. The encouragement to grow up is there in verse 8: if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Possessing the qualities is good, but the real goal is to possess them in larger amounts; to be able to measure that there is more now than last year. For your whole life, the entire span of discipleship, you are looking to grow.

How wonderful it is to see Christian retirees, still looking to grow – still striving for an increasing measure of godliness. The standard setting, for a follower of Jesus, is growth.

Sometimes we can see that really clearly – think about ten years ago and you can probably see God giving you growth. You are more forgiving; more patient; more kind; more knowledgeable in the gospel. You have these qualities in a larger amount than you used to.

Looking back at verse number 8 again – some Bible translations have *unfruitful* – instead of *unproductive* – which reminds us that Peter is aiming this teaching at plant-like discipleship growth. Unproductive might not look like a plant-type word, but it is.

Ineffectiveness carries the idea of idle, and of not working. And it also has a plant-garden sense to it – where you expect soil to produce something, to grow something – but it is idle or barren. Where the gardener thought there would be growth, there was none. And Peter is saying: when you know Jesus, that is rich soil, which brings growth. How sad to have an unfruitful, idle knowledge of the Lord Jesus. How sad to have the information and then produce nothing, no growth.

God's word is telling us not to be like that, and instead giving us a picture of the growing, fruitful plant. From verse 5 we get the picture of the flowering, productive plant:

For this very reason make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.

All at once this can feel overwhelming – how could I be growing in all that? But just like plant that adds small amounts each day, so we are invited to continually add, continually grow, a small amount each day. You could pick one of these to work on this year – Do you want to add self-control and increase in it? Do you want to add kindness and increase in it? Do you want to add knowledge and increase in it? What if you paired up with someone and encouraged each other?

We are not left to wonder in which direction Jesus wants us to grow – we are given this picture of the flowering, productive plant to help us. 2 Peter 1 is like the plastic tag on the new plant helping us to see how we are to grow.

By The Reverend **Jonathan Holt**