Rooted - Part 2

Grow Deep, Live Strong

# Grow

## (1 Corinthians 3:1-9)

Last week we began a new 4-week series called Rooted and we talked about being planted; and how seeds need healthy soil to sink their roots down into like a tree planted by streams of water. And that’s important because when a seed is planted, we expect it to grow, to yield its fruit in season and that it’s leaf would not wither. But it’s not always that simple, it’s not always that easy, because sometimes the soil is not the best, sometimes it’s the environment or the climate or any of a number of things, but it can really be a struggle to get that seed to grow to full fruit bearing maturity.

Now, as believers we want to grow, we want to prosper, we want to bear fruit in our lives, and so this week I want to talk about some of the difficulties we face and ways to cultivate the soil of our lives to achieve growth. This is important because we all start out the same way, we’re all born into this world with nothing, but the very moment we are birthed, taking our first breath of air, we are forced into a various number of different environments, encountering difficulties, and yes, even privileges. But so many of us go through life without knowing what God has prepared for us; you know there is something more, but you don’t know how to get there.

It’s for that reason that God will bring someone into your life who like a midwife will help birth you, bringing you into the next season. And so, ideally there will be someone as Ruth had Naomi, or Elisha had Elijah, or Timothy had Paul, someone to help you discover God’s vision for your lives. You see, we all need someone who has been where we are and whose been where we’re trying to go, someone who can introduce you and familiarize you with the new environment that you are in, and help you move to the next level. And so, if God sent somebody into your life who has been where you are trying to go, it’s because the Holy Spirit has made them a midwife in your life to birth you and help you into the next season.

It’s important to recognize that none of us are self-made, none of us have made it here on our own, we’ve been brought here, and if we’re going to be who God intends for us to be, we need to find that one God sent to bring us where he wants us to be. It doesn’t matter who you are or where you are as you are seeking God’s purpose in your life; the reason you are where you are is because somebody believed in you. Like Moses believed in Joshua and spent time with him, encouraging him, and teaching him God’s Word; we need to understand the Word of God so that we can discover God’s purpose for our lives.

You can’t give a greater gift to another human being than to believe in them, like Moses believed in Joshua and opened doors for him. But in the Scripture, I want to share with you today, the text in Ezekiel chapter 16 says that Jerusalem didn’t have anybody. Now, it would have been helpful if there had been somebody like a midwife who could’ve helped in the process, easing the pain of transitioning, but that wasn’t the case. And in verse one of Ezekiel chapter 16, the prophet tells us,

“The word of the Lord came to me: "Son of man, confront Jerusalem with her detestable practices and say, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says to Jerusalem: Your ancestry and birth were in the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite” (Ezekiel 16:1-3).

Now, I understand we don’t get to pick the circumstances that we are born into, we don’t get to pick our parents or the people that raise us, and each of us has to make the best of what we’ve got, but can you imagine what it would be like to be this baby? In this text God was reminding the children of Israel that they had descended from the Amorites and Hittites, the great city of Jerusalem was once inhabited by Jebusites, and even their father Abraham was an idol worshiping pagan when God called him to leave his family and go to Canaan. And so, the picture, the image here is of the city of Jerusalem, the people of God being birthed, being pushed out, forced relentlessly into the next season, into the culture without the benefit of help.

Verse 4 says, “On the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to make you clean, nor were you rubbed with salt or wrapped in cloths” (Ezekiel 16:4).

And so, it’s not that there was anything wrong with the birthing process, everything happened the way it was supposed to happen, there was no harm to the mother, there weren’t any abnormalities, but this baby was suffering because it was birthed without any help. Verse 5 says,

“No one looked on you with pity or had compassion enough to do any of these things for you. Rather, you were thrown out into the open field, for on the day you were born you were despised” (Ezekiel 16:4-5).

As we consider this text it’s not a very pleasant picture as we see this newborn child despised, thrown out into the open field, cast out like seed on the ground, still filthy with the residue of birth not having been given the care that every baby deserves. And so, the sense of abandonment is overwhelming, the mistreatment of this infant is shocking in its defenseless vulnerability, and what should be a joyous occasion is just so much less because this baby was despised. It was thrown out into the open field, left to survive on its own, to grow or not to grow, and this scene stands in contradiction to everything I believe about caring for children.

This infant is born into this season of innocence, precious and unique, but suffering, not from abuse, not because it was beaten, but because of neglect. Of course, neglect is abuse, and so this child is suffering, physically and emotionally neglected, and if you’ve ever felt ignored then you understand the image of this text. If you’ve ever been rejected, denied, deprived and neglected, then you know what it feels like to be thrown out into the open field. And yet, what we are going to discover today is that we are God’s field, that he is watching over us and caring for us even in those times when we feel neglected. In fact, the Bible says,

“He who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep” (Psalm 121:3-4).

And Jesus reminds us that he is watching over us and caring for us, even when we are doubting and worrying about his ability to care for us, even when we’re being pulled in different directions and feel like we’ve been neglected, and he says this in Matthew chapter 6. In verse 28, he described how everything in nature works together. He said,

"See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?” (Matthew 6:28-30).

And so, just as God makes the flowers grow and clothes the grass of the field, he will feed us, growing and clothing us. But because of our lack of faith, sometimes it’s uncomfortable, and sometimes like babies we cry, but when it’s all said and done God can deliver us to where he wants us to be.

I want to talk to you today as babies, boys and girls, men and women alike, who have outgrown the constraints of the place where you once found nurture and nourishment. And maybe today you feel like you’re out in the field, neglected by your circumstances, your relationships, and abandoned by your difficulties. You may feel stuck and imprisoned where you are, maybe even surrounded by people fighting and quarreling about your situation, your health, or even politics, but it’s important to remember that God is working. In fact, this became such a problem for the Apostle Paul that he addressed it in his 1st letter to the Corinthians. He wrote in chapter 3,

“What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe — as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow” (1 Corinthians 3:5-6).

In other words, God is working. The seed matters, the soil matters, having water and sunlight matters; but true spiritual growth is not growth by human hands. And so, Paul clearly states that an individual’s growth is not a result of man’s work, but it’s God who makes all things grow.

In the same way, if you keep feeding on the Word of God, it will open up your mind until you become uncomfortable where you were once comfortable. Some of you know what I’m talking about because what used to be funny, isn’t funny anymore; what you used to enjoy, you don’t enjoy anymore; and so you don’t understand it, but you’ve got too much hope to stay in this rut, in this hole, in this barren place. You’ve outgrown it because you’ve been focused on God’s work in your life.

Apparently, the readers of Paul’s letter felt that one leader was better than another and it was dividing them instead of helping them to grow and become more productive. And sometimes, we do the same things as we compare which preacher is better, which church is most meaningful, and these things all have a place, but ultimately the growth is up to God. And so, Paul writes in verse seven,

“So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building” (1 Corinthians 3:7-9).

And so, God sees each human heart as a field planted and ready to bear fruit. Therefore, if we are God’s fellow workers, co-workers, and he is interested in our growth, we must dedicate ourselves to reading God’s word and spending time with him in prayer. We want to immerse ourselves in biblical community, regularly worshiping Jesus with others who love Jesus and are growing themselves. We must constantly evaluate our lives because the expectation is that we would grow and mature in the faith. In God’s field growth is not an option, to be stagnant or complacent is not an option, and so Paul says,

“Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly — mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready” (1 Corinthians 3:1-2).

In other words, each of us start as an infant in the faith, and it’s expected that we would grow and mature as a follower of Christ. Therefore, it’s our responsibility to take the necessary steps in our lives to be the catalysts for change God intends us to be. That’s why Peter says,

“Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good” (1 Peter 2:2-3).

But as we reflect on the scene described in Ezekiel chapter 16, it wasn’t an environment of growth, because there wasn’t any nourishment, no expressions of love and concern for the baby. This child was neglected beneath the open skies out in the field, much like many of us today, and so we’re not used to touching anymore, we’re not used to hugging anymore, because intimacy has its dangers.

Today we’ve changed the way we do things, we’re keeping our distance, because touching is risky. You know, it’s like, I love you, but I’m not going to touch you. And so, it seems like it’s contradictory, but the loving thing is not to spread the virus. And as I was considering Israel here in Ezekiel chapter 16, I wondered if it wasn’t also a prophetic image of many churches today. You know, churches that are good at getting people to the altar, good at birthing babies, but they’re not very good at discipling them. Churches that have lots of members, but no disciples. Because it’s in that context that God said to Jerusalem, to the people of God, you are like a baby pushed out of the womb, forced into a cold and unwelcoming environment and neglected.

God speaks in this text of the dilemma the nation of Israel is in, the church is in, this baby is in, of being neglected. And it makes me wonder what kind of people we are birthing, I mean are we really caring for them, do we have as many disciples as we have members? This text really caused me to reflect on whether the church is meeting your core needs as an individual or if we’re just having babies.

And so, I want to explain from a theological perspective how this passage in Ezekiel can apply to us today. You see, this baby in Ezekiel chapter 16, Jerusalem, this image of Israel in verse 4, was still attached to the mother. In other words, it had been born, but it was still connected to its mother in a way that was never intended. You see, it’s not natural for a baby to be dependent on the mother outside of the womb in the same way as it was inside of the womb. The baby was intended to grow and become independent but this baby wasn’t craving milk because verse four says,

“On the day you were born your cord was not cut” (Ezekiel 16:4).

This baby was still dependent on the food its mother ate and I wonder if there are some of you who were born again but no one has ever cut your cord. There hasn’t been that separation and you’re still dependent on the one who birthed you. In other words, there hasn’t been any real personal growth or development because you don’t open a Bible until Sunday. And so, as long as you are attached to the cord, the only reason why you come to church is so that you can eat.

That’s what the apostle Paul was saying to the Corinthian church. He said,

“You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere men?” (1 Corinthians 3:3-4).

In other words, some of you are still acting like you did before you came to Christ, before you came to church, and you’re still acting like the world. And so, Paul says your acting like “mere infants in Christ” because when was the last time you fed somebody? This is what I want to help you understand, if you have not personally led somebody to Christ and discipled them, helping them to grow into the child they were created to be, I wonder if your cord has been cut?

Ezekiel said, the baby was born, but it was still covered in the residue of the birth. The Bible says in verse four,

“Nor were you washed with water to make you clean” (Ezekiel 16:4).

And some of you are still worldly, you still look like what you been through, you’re still replaying in your mind every pain, every barrier, all the pressure, and every limitation to keep you where you are. But you can’t stay where you were, you’ve got to move, you’ve got to grow, and yet God said,

“No one looked on you with pity or had compassion enough to do any of these things for you” (Ezekiel 16:5).

You see, we need somebody that loves us enough to get in our face and ask us the tough questions. Somebody that cares enough to wash you, asking you why your life isn’t lining up with the Word of God. You see, this isn’t children’s church, this isn’t youth group, and washing a baby isn’t always fun and games. Sometimes there’s crying and screaming, sometimes they hold their breath, it’s traumatic, but bathing is important because people can tell when you haven’t been washed. That’s why the Bible encourages us to…

“Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water” (Hebrews 10:22).

I wonder how many people in this room or those who are watching online have really been washed? Others of you, maybe you were neglected, left uncovered, no one swaddled you and wrapped you in clothes? You might be saved, you might be delivered, but you’ve been neglected and left uncovered. Now, we can’t see it today, but the bruises and scrapes are there, and you have gotten really good at disguising who you really are.

That’s why the gospel is so powerful because we need to be covered, we want the word of God to define us, we want the word of God to heal us. In fact, the first thing God did when he found Adam naked and ashamed was that he covered him. The Bible says,

“God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them” (Genesis 3:21).

And we don’t want to remain uncovered, but we want to be nurtured, we want to be helped, we want to be covered by the power of the living God. And right now, the Spirit of God is getting behind your makeup, behind your nice clothes and getting down into your business. You see, God wants to do a new thing in your life, because he saw you left uncovered, thrown out into the open field and despised.

It’s hard to be a baby out in an open field and that’s why many of us are in church this morning. We are trying to get some cover, some direction, some help, and some healing. It’s hard to be neglected, but the Bible says in verse six, God passed by…

“Then I passed by and saw you kicking about in your blood, and as you lay there in your blood, I said to you, "Live!" (Ezekiel 16:6).

When the Glory comes into the church, God is passing by, he’s doing a checkup and he’s dealing with some issues. He came to see how you’re really doing and he said,

“God called to the man, "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9).

You see, when he passed by, everybody else looked away, but today Jesus is coming for you. He’s coming into your moment of pain, your darkest night and your deepest agony. When he passed by, he saw you laying there in your blood, and it doesn’t matter what you’ve got going on in your life right now. You may have stopped believing in yourself, other people may have stopped believing in you, but I’m here to tell you today that there is a God in heaven who believes in you. And he said to you, “Live!”

“I made you grow like a plant of the field. You grew up and developed and became the most beautiful of jewels. Your breasts were formed and your hair grew, you who were naked and bare” (Ezekiel 16:7).

"'Later I passed by, and when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for love, I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness. I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Sovereign Lord, and you became mine” (Ezekiel 16:8).

Today you need to know that others may have written you off, others may have taken your file and shredded it and thrown it away, but God believes in you and called you to grow. You may have thought you were going to die; you may have thought you weren’t going to make it, but God said live. Life is coming into your spirit, coming into your body, and it’s coming into your house. God said, “Live. I made you grow like a plant of the field.” You and I are able to stand tall today because somebody believed in us.

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