KIDS What are three marks of green thumb growing Christians?

I love spring. Really, I enjoy all four seasons; I don’t think I would enjoy living somewhere where it never snowed or where it never got to be 90°. I could do without the humidity…which is probably why I love spring. It means a break from the cold, sunshine, Easter, grilling, hiking, eating outside, yard work, the start of baseball season. I love it all.

I really do enjoy yard work…on our little yard…not yours, and as goofy as it sounds, spring time brings back so many memories of mine and Rachel’s first year of marriage. She was still in school, and she had a job where she worked late. I worked over 70 hours a week Sunday-Friday, but Saturday morning was ours, and it was our lazy day.

We had a TV that someone had given us, and it got about 3 channels on a cloudless day, when you stuck your tongue out just right. One of the shows that it picked up most Saturday mornings a gardening show. We watched it the first time as a joke, making fun of it the whole time, but then (it being pretty much the only show we could find) it became
part of our Saturday morning ritual. Twenty-one year old senior citizens right there.

One of the things that it let us do was dream of what we *could* do someday. Our duplex had a strip of grass 1ft x 8ft in the front, and that was about it; so we watched and planned what we *would* do...if we *could*...someday if we owned our own yard.

One of the gardeners on the show always talked about orchids and how easy they were to care for. We thought, “It’s an indoor plant. We have no yard. What better way to start than with this plant?” So we spent the $15 at Lowes (and that was an investment...a planned expenditure for our budget!) We brought it home, put it in the window sill where we thought it looked best and watched in horror as within a few day’s time that plant withered up and died. The next several weeks was an experiment and a practice in futility: we watered more...we watered less...we gave it sun...we stuck it in a closet...we set it outside...we wrapped the pot in a blanket. Every single thing that we could find on the internet we did to try to bring that thing back to life (and restore our $15 investment), but to no avail...that thing died.

I was talking about it with an older person in our church who was an excellent gardener, and do you know what she said? “Corey...some people just have a *green thumb*, and others...do not.”

Let’s just (so I don’t feel too bad about myself) take a straw poll tonight. If you are one of the “chosen ones” with a green thumb, give me a thumb’s up. *If you’re like me...an outcast...with a black thumb (?), give me a thumb’s down.*
Here’s the thing. We all know that’s a myth, right? You know that’s not true. We all know that there are not people who are born into this world with just the right molecular makeup to grow plants well. It’s not true…It’s an old wives tale. Really, It’s just an excuse that we black-thumbers use to make us feel better when our plants die. “Not my fault…I just don’t have ‘The Touch.’”

No…there are a few things that I have noticed about people with a “green thumb” that make me know that it is not just a natural gift or predilection:

1. **They know their plants.** My mom and I could walk through the exact same nursery or garden. I might enjoy looking at everything, but she knows the names of the plants. She know where they are best planted. She know their seasons: annuals, perennials, biennials. She has observed them, studied them and probably even experimented with them.

2. **They make their plants a priority.** I’m not saying that they are the most important thing in their life, but they have disciplined themselves into a routine of care for their plants. They know that they have to spend time working on their plants. When they are going to be away from home for an extended period of time, they ask someone to go by and water their plants. I know some of you who even take your potted plants to a friend’s house when you go on a longer vacation.

   One spring, we had done everything right. We kept these two hanging ferns alive and looking good on our front porch. We even
took them in so they wouldn’t get too much sun every now and then, but then, June hit. That meant 3 weeks of camp that year, the national convention and preaching at a camp in Virginia that summer. Pretty much no time at home that month. What do you think happened to those ferns? Do you think they lived? Absolutely not. They shriveled up and died. Do you think it was because I have a black thumb? No. I didn’t make the plants a priority of our schedule.

3. **They find a lot of joy in their gardening.** While we enjoyed dreaming about what we *could* do in our “someday” yard and we enjoyed watching the show *about* gardening, we have never really found a lot of fulfillment in the actual working of a garden. We like the dream; we like the watching; we even like the idea of the end result, but all of the work poured into it…for us, it just isn’t worth it at this point in our life with everything going on.

   But that’s not the case for the green thumb. They enjoy the outcome, but most that I have talked to really even enjoy the work that it takes to get to that point. They find a lot of joy not just in their garden but in their gardening. And that is why their gardens do well. Well, some of you are miles ahead of me. My introduction is longer on purpose. You know that we are not a garden club, and that we have not met here this morning to talk about my plant woes. The truth of the matter is that there are a LOT of correlations between that analogy and our spiritual maturing process.

   Some of us look at spiritual maturity, and we think, “Nope…that’s not me…I can’t do that…that’s for the really spiritual people…the preachers,
missionaries, pastors, deacons...that’s for people with a spiritual green thumb.” You know what? That’s a myth. That’s a lie from Satan himself who wants to keep you powerless and ineffective for the kingdom. He wants to keep you small and not growing, thinking that some people just got this whole Christian thing... but not you. That’s an absolute lie.

Spiritual maturity is for EVERY Christian EVERYWHERE. No Christian is born-again with some kind of special molecular makeup that helps them mature more richly or faster. The opposite is true, too. No Christian is born-again with a black thumb that keeps them from growing in Christ. Those are just excuses that stagnant Christians give to make themselves feel better for not growing in Christ. We know it’s a myth...it’s fake...false...a lie.

The same that we said about green thumb gardeners can be said about Christians who are dynamically growing in Christ:

1. While the green thumb Gardner might know his plants. **Growing Christians know their Bible.** Look, I’m not saying that God gives divine revelation or a special new urge to read spiritual self-help books, but the growing Christian is going to know their Bible, or at least they are going to begin to know their Bible. They are going to be able to discern between right/wrong, wise/foolish, doctrine/preference.

I have been blessed with some amazing Sunday school teachers growing up: Bro. Joe, Ron, Bill, Pat, Don. Most of you don’t know these men, but they all made an impact on my life. Probably none more so than a man by the name of Fred Gay. When Bro. Fred gave his life to Christ, one of the very first things he did was he
started reading the Bible, which might sound simple and obvious, but he really read his Bible. His pastor at the time told him that the average person could read the whole Bible in 70 hours.

So do you know what he did? He took a few day's vacation from his job that he saved up, and he read the Word of God. He did not particularly love reading; he wasn’t a bookworm or anything, but he figured that if he was a Christian who said he believed the Bible, then he probably ought to know what it said.

He didn’t know what it all said after he read it, but over time and a lot of dedication, he was the one who actually taught us 7th grade boys how to use a concordance, recognize verb tense and even read a little out of the Greek New Testament as a reference tool. 7th graders taught by a layman of the church who didn’t have any spiritual green thumb, but he did the work. He knew his Bible. All of that came because he and every growing Christian…

2. They make(s) their walk with Christ a priority. Their spiritual walk with Christ is the most important thing in their life. Like the gardener who has disciplined their everyday life into routine care for their plants, the growing Christian does more so. It’s not just an event in their morning or on Sunday to them; it is every day, all day.

   They see their relationship with their spouse as the parable that God meant for it to be: Jesus and the church. That through this union all the nations of the world can be blessed and see Jesus.

   They view parenting/grandparenting as a holy calling that actually brings them closer to Christ. GOD TEACHES US SO MUCH
ABOUT HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH US IN OUR RELATIONSHIP
WITH OUR CHILDREN. I am learning daily more about my Father
through fatherhood.

They see their job not as “working for the weekend” but as a
means to provide for their family and build the kingdom of God by
stewarding their resources well and by affecting and influencing
coworkers for Christ.

They see everything through the lens of their spiritual growth: their
kids’ athletic events, their neighbors, their church life and community.

It’s not just that Jesus is the first on their list. He is the list.
Growing Christians know that Jesus is not just a spiritual notch on
the priority list. He IS the priority and all of life flows from Him.

3. They find joy in growing closer to Christ. They actually enjoy their
spiritual development. That may sound foreign to some of us…as
foreign as saying that gardeners and farmers enjoy the
backbreaking work…but they do. They absolutely love it. The
growing Christian finds great joy in their spiritual development with
Jesus.

Now look, there are moments when they have to get out of bed
to read Scripture…Sure, there are some weekends where they just
don’t feel like going to church, but by and large, the upward swing
of their life is that they find great joy not just in the finished work of
being able to get into Heaven when they die but in the actual
cultivating and sweat of spiritual growth. They don’t see Christianity
as a means to an end [Heaven]. They see it as a life with Christ and
then life more fully with Christ when we do get to Heaven. They love the process…they found joy in growth.

Difficult at times? Absolutely, but it is so rewarding, and they get to see it take root not just in their own lives but in others around them, too.

In short, there are no super Christians born with the knack for spiritual maturity. Saying that there are “spiritual green thumbs” out there is just an excuse for our lack of wisdom, our lack of dedication, our lack of prioritizing…ultimately… it is an excuse for our lack of faith in Christ.

I want us to get real serious, real fast here. **When something is alive, it grows.** Yes, there are seasons of minimal growth and seasons of exponential growth, but it grows nonetheless. I am not interested in making genuine Christians doubt their faith in Christ. I have been there…done that…got several camp and youth conference t-shirts to prove it, where every service I sat in was almost just a ploy to ramp up the number of decisions. I am not interested in doing that at all. I am, however, very concerned for the person who says they are Christian because they prayed a prayer one time a long time ago and nothing grew out of it. If that is you, you are putting your trust/ your faith in an incantation-like prayer instead of putting it in Christ Jesus.

As plainly as I can say it, with my heart on my sleeve, **ALIVE THINGS GROW. DEAD THINGS DO NOT GROW.**

I believe that many have believed a strong delusion and are being lulled to sleep, sitting in churches, resting on a membership role, doing the outward things but they have not grown in Christ one spiritual millimeter
since they prayed that prayer 10-20 years ago. Something alive is going to grow.

So that is right where Peter begins his steps to spiritual maturity: faith. We have been taking our time on Sunday evenings through this book, and I am even revisiting this sermon because I want us to slow down and get a good long view because this is the Grand Canyon of Christianity: faith in Christ—nothing is more important in this life, because without it in this life, you don’t get a next life.

Verses 5-7 lays out the natural growth process expected of every Christian:

- **Faith**
- **Virtue (moral excellence)**
- **Knowledge (Biblical)**
- **Self-control (wisdom)**
- **Perseverance (healthy dissatisfaction)**
- **Godliness (living like you’re looking up)**
- **Brotherly kindness (living in community with other believers)**
- **Christian love (sharing Christ with the world)**

Or, as Scripture has it recorded:

2 Peter 1:5-7 But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge,
6 to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness,
7 to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.
It all starts with faith. Everything else grows from faith. That is why I have encouraged you to flip the list. I think it rightly shows that faith is the foundation that everything else on the list is built upon.

If the American church were to take a diagnostic, I think we would find that we are lacking in just about every one of those from the top to the bottom. And they are all systemic problems. We are lacking in Sharing Christ with the world—living in community with other believers well—Godliness—perseverance. Do you think Christians have a self-control problem today? Are we Biblically literate? Are we virtuous…morally excellent? Or do we dabble in immorality?

I truly believe that we have all of these issues not because we are just going through a season of minimal growth but because true faith has not even taken root in the heart of most congregants across our nation.

This is the pastor’s heart this morning, coming off a big day like we had on Easter. We do not have a morality problem in the world. We have a faith problem in the world. Our morality will change when our faith changes us. Everything else other than faith is a bandaid on the soul.

And since Jesus wrote in Scripture that I am accountable for you, that one day I will stand and answer for every single one of you, I want to ask if I haven’t asked you in a while, “Are you Christ’s? Are you saved? Is there true, genuine faith in your heart?” Not “Did you pray a prayer” although that is definitely something that occurs at the salvation process. I’m not asking when you got baptized or if you have joined the church yet, although I believe that those are two very important important events that need to happen in the life of a growing Christian.
I'll go the other way too...I’m not even asking if you are backslidden, away from God at this moment, although I truly believe God can most certainly restore you through a sermon like this this morning.

I’m asking “Are you His?” Are you living a life of repentance? Is your belief (your mental assent—your agreeing) that Jesus Christ is the Son of the Living God actually working itself into every aspect of your life, or is it just staying in your head as some religious rite that you agree with in order to get to Heaven but is totally separated from your everyday life?

It doesn’t get involved in your dating preferences, entertainment choices or your political views. It is totally segmented from the rest of your life: you’ve got your religious life over here and everything else over there.

If it is just a head knowledge, if it is just a spiritual rite or ritual that you do or say or that you think you once said a long time ago so you’re good now, let me tell you very plainly: you are not a Christian. You have believed someone’s religious lie instead of the Bible.

Let’s not even talk about adding virtue (morality) to your life. That’s just going to whitewash the problem...pretty up the casket. Let’s forget about the 7 other steps in this spiritual growth process this morning, and let’s look at that foundational one.

Faith...is it possible that you are not seeing any fruit in your life because faith has yet to take root in your life? We try to cover it up by working really hard on morality or Biblical knowledge or brotherly kindness, but the problem is not the fruit. The problem is the root. Faith has laid on the surface for so long, but this morning, let’s drop the pretenses, forget the excuses, and let it take hold in your heart. Are you Christ’s?
I think it would be right to end my pastoral plea for sincere faith in Christ this morning by reading a passage from the book of Romans, probably the most plain-languaged call for salvation in all of Scripture.

Here’s the thing: much of this passage is taken from The Roman’s Road, and that means that many of you have it memorized or are at least very familiar with it. So my fear is that reading such a well-known text of Scripture this morning will have some of us just gloss over it and not really listen to it. So please, as if you were picking up the Bible for the first time in your life hear what the Spirit says

Romans 10:9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. [I’m not trying to get you to doubt your salvation. If it is there, you ought not be doubting]

10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. [This is a both and. The heart and the mouth. A lot of people say it, but few truly have it in their heart]

11 For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.”

12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him.

13 For “whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

If you have any doubts or any worries about your life in Christ, why not get it right this morning? Forget about that memory…that baptism…if you cannot plainly say “I am Christ’s. I am saved.” Let's get it right today.