

Rivers of Living Water

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[0 : 00] So I'm going to start off this morning with a tale of woe from my life. So if there's Kleenex nearby, you may want to grab some.! So this morning I'm getting ready to take out the trash.

You know, it's a normal household chore. And I bent over to get a new trash bag. And I coughed as I bent over. And right here, I felt a twinge in my back.

What on earth is going on? I realized in three weeks and two days, if any of you are keeping track, is my 60th birthday. I'm entering the fourth quarter.

And maybe that's connected. And it dawned on me that's kind of how we look at life. We have this expectation as we get older of decline, of weakening muscles, maybe weakening minds.

Things are just more difficult. I shared, I think, in sermons a few weeks ago about this really good book called From Strength to Strength about what it means to be successful in the fourth quarter of life.

[1 : 08] And this author talked about the decline that we've just come to accept. This is just what it is. I want to give you a different perspective. And that's really going to be the focus of our sermon this morning.

I think I've shared this story with you in the past. If not, it'll be fresh and you'll probably hear it again. Because this is a story that's full of application. When I was 19, Kara and I decided that we were going to climb Pikes Peak.

If you've ever been to not the Pikes Peak that's just north of town, just to be clear. Not to be a little mocking, but the real Pikes Peak is a little bit more impressive out in Colorado.

Same discoverer, by the way, Zebulon Pike. But we decided we're going to climb Pikes Peak in Colorado Springs. The trail starts at 7,500 feet. And over 13 miles, you climb to 14,110 feet.

It's a grind. I was 19. I was at the peak of my physical health. I've got a picture from that time frame that I couldn't share up here because it wouldn't be entirely appropriate.

[2 : 09] But I was ripped. I mean, you could see all of my muscles and there were abs and I look great. And so I thought, how hard is it going to be to climb Pikes Peak? Well, you know, if you're not prepared and you're not very wise, I got four hours of sleep the night before.

I didn't take adequate water. I brought my lunch in a gym bag I threw over my shoulder. And long story short, we failed the summit. And that kind of haunted me for years.

Fast forward 29 years. I'm 48 years old. I said to Carrie, you want to do it again? I said, no, nope. Once was enough.

So Kayla and I got to talking and let's climb Pikes Peak. So this time, because I'm older and wiser, we trained. Every week, we would climb the beginning of the trail.

It's a one mile long staircase that climbs 2,000 feet. It's brutal. But we went up that every week to get in shape. Interesting side note, the people that failed to make it up that, what's called the Manitou Incline, were always young people.

[3 : 18] Kayla and I were routinely lapped by old people who knew how to pace themselves. There was one show-off who had to have been in his late 70s who had a cockatiel on his shoulder.

He looked like a pirate. And he would lap us twice. He was a tough guy. So we trained. I put my lunch in a backpack. I got eight hours of sleep.

I carried lots of water. Now, I'm not going to tell you it was easy. But I summited Pikes Peak. And I stood. It was kind of awestruck that here I am.

I'm 30 years older than I had been when I tried it before and I summited. A few weeks later, I was talking to a friend of mine who was a year or two older about our adventure. And he says, you know, John, that's quite an accomplishment for a man of your age.

What do you mean a man of my age? He said, dude, seriously, you're 48 years old. It's not a small accomplishment to summit Pikes Peak at 48 years old.

[4 : 21] What made the difference? Wisdom made the difference. Experience. Experience. You take knowledge and experience, you put them together in the right way, and you get wisdom.

And that's what made the difference. And when we look at Ezekiel 47 this morning, that's what you're going to see. So I want you to turn in your Bibles to several passages.

I'll give you these up front. Some of them will be up here. Some of them won't. So Ezekiel 47.

Actually, I'll give them to you in order. Isaiah 53, Ezekiel 47, Revelation 22, all the way at the end of your Bibles.

And while you're turning there, don't get distracted. Try to multitask. Listen as I'm talking. I'm going to do a quick recap of our last three weeks. So two weeks ago, I took you into Luke chapter 4, and we saw Jesus' first declaration in public of who he was.

I'm the Messiah. He went to his hometown. He opened the Bible to Isaiah 61. And he read, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. For I have been anointed by the Lord to proclaim good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, to announce release to the prisoners and freedom to the captives, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.

[5 : 41] And it was a hard stop. And if you recall, what we drew out of that was a couple of things. First of all, Jesus was publicly proclaiming himself to be the Messiah. I'm the one that you've been looking for.

But what we also begin to see is kind of like when the sun is just coming up in the morning. You just see that very, the first sliver of the sun coming over the horizon.

And Jesus begins to say, I'm the one, and you've got it totally wrong. I'm not going to be what you expect. And we learned that because he stopped reading in Isaiah 61 before the next phrase, which was, the day of God's vengeance.

And we learned that there's a multi-thousand years, thousands of years gap between the announcement of the favorable year of the Lord and the day of God's vengeance.

And in that gap is us. We hear the gospel. We come to Christ. The Gentiles are brought in as part of this newly created group of God's people that he's preparing for his reign as a triumphant king.

[6 : 55] So we saw that in Isaiah 61. And then Isaiah 53, and if you've got your Bibles, look at verses 4 through 6. We saw how that mission was going to be accomplished.

Wayne said it very, very well. Well, we're lost in sin. There is no way that we can possibly qualify ourselves to enter into the kingdom of God.

God had to intervene, and he intervened in the person of his son. This was very confusing to Bible scholars of antiquity.

Jewish rabbis would read the Bible, and they'd see this line of prophecy about a suffering Messiah. And they'd see a line of prophecy about a triumphant king, and they just couldn't figure out how does this go together.

So what they did is they kind of dismissed the suffering servant part, because who wants to read about that, spiritualized it, and then said, yeah, the triumphant king, when the Messiah comes, he's going to kick butt and take names.

[8 : 01] That's who we want to see. Isaiah 53 is one of the very confusing passages. Verse 4 through 6, Those big multi-syllable words just say sin.

The things where we don't measure up to God's expectations. Transgression, iniquity, sin, it all is the same thing. And what it boils down to is separation from God. The chastening for our well-being fell upon him.

In other words, what needed to be done to allow us to become a part of the people of God, the price that had to be paid was too steep for us to pay. So Jesus paid it for us.

The chastening for our well-being fell upon him. And by his scourging, we are healed. The wrath of God was poured out on Jesus so it didn't have to fall on us.

All of us like sheep have gone astray. Each of us has turned to his own way. But the Lord has caused the iniquity, it's another word that means sin, the iniquity of us all to fall on him.

[9 : 19] And Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5.21, that he, Jesus, he who knew no sin, became sin on our behalf, that we might have the righteousness of God in him.

It's the most unequal exchange in human history. Your sin was placed on Jesus. The perfect, clean, without blemish lamb of God.

And all of your sin was placed on him. And he took your punishment. That's the message of Isaiah 53. This is the core, this is the essence of Jesus' work as a Messiah.

He's our Savior. Because he died on the cross for our sins. That's the beginning. This week as we go into Ezekiel 47, what we're going to look at is, what do we have to look forward to?

What's our future? Because it's awesome. It's fantastic. Now, put your finger there. I'm going to pause for a second. We're going to pray for our study of God's word.

[10:28] But we're also going to pause for a second. We're going to pray. We're going to pray for a group of people who has popped onto my radar, and even on the radar of the secular press across the United States.

The church in Nigeria is under tremendous persecution. Thousands upon thousands of people have been displaced because they claim Jesus.

Thousands have died for their faith. They're suffering persecution that is similar to what Christians suffered under the Roman Caesars, and we need to pray for them.

We mentioned another verse out of Ezekiel, that God was looking for somebody to stand in the gap, and he found nobody. When we pray, we stand in the gap.

We step up. We need to stand with our brothers and sisters in Nigeria. So let's pray. Let's pray.

[11:41] Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Father, several times the Apostle Paul talks about making up for what's lacking in the suffering of Christ, which seems to be such a hard thing to understand.

But there is suffering that still goes on for those of us who have chosen to follow you. Sometimes it's subtle, like what we experience here in America, but God, today in Nigeria, people are afraid to celebrate Christmas.

They're afraid to openly proclaim Christ. They're afraid because they could be killed. They could be thrown out of their homes. Their church could be burned. And God, we pray for them.

We pray for strength. Strength to endure. To be the people who know you. And because they know you, they will stand firm and take action.

They will expand the gospel. And God, we pray as they stand, that even those among their oppressors would come to faith in Christ. that they would see something different. They would see courage.

[12:50] Because our Nigerian brothers and sisters know who they believed. That they are convinced that you are able to keep what they have committed all the way to that day.

That you have promised that you will perfect the work that you have begun in them all the way until the day of Christ. And Lord, we want to be people who stand in the gap who continue to pray for them.

To ask you to intercede. To ask you to protect. Finally, God, I just pray for our time as we read your word. As we open the Bible.

As we think about this passage in Ezekiel 47. Help us to see directly how it applies to us. Both in the future as something to look forward to but also in the present. As a picture of how we're supposed to live.

God, I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Jeff, would you mute me just for one second? Thank you.

[13:56] There's some things that just don't need to be magnified or put on a recording. We don't need that for posterity. So Ezekiel 47, I'm just going to read the first 12 verses. Then he brought me back to the door of the house and behold, water was flowing from the houses of the temple, by the way.

The temple in Jerusalem. Let me stop right there. I need to give you some context. There's lots of really boring parts of the Bible. Ezekiel 40, chapter 40, all the way to the end of the book is one of those.

It is this excruciatingly boring rendition. It's a verbal rendition of the blueprints of the future temple. Imagine if we took the blueprints for tri-state, instead of showing you the blueprints, we instead read a description to you.

Mind-numbingly boring. That's what that, that's this whole passage. But in the middle of it is this scene. Then he brought me back to the door of the temple and behold, water was flowing from under the threshold of the house toward the east for the house faced east.

So it's looking from Jerusalem down to the Dead Sea. And the water was flowing down from under from the right side of the house from south of the altar. He brought me out by way of the north gate

and led me around on the outside to the outer gate by way of the gate that faces east.

[15 : 15] And behold, water was trickling from the south side. So he's at the gate and it's just a little trickle.

There's nothing there. Or very little. When the man went toward the east with a line in his hand he measured a thousand cubits. That's fifteen hundred feet. Not very far. And he led me through the water water reaching the ankles.

So it's gotten a little deeper. Again he measured a thousand fifteen hundred feet and led me through the water water reaching to the knees. Again he measured a thousand and led me through the water reaching to the loins or to the waist.

Again he measured a thousand and it was a river that I could not ford. For the water had risen enough water to swim in a river that could not be forded. In other words you couldn't walk across it. You needed a boat or a ferry. He said to me son of man that's God's affectionate nickname for Ezekiel in the book of Ezekiel. Son of man have you seen this?

[16 : 17] Do you understand it? Then he brought me back to the bank of the river. Now when I had returned behold on the bank of the river there were very many trees on the one side and on the other. Then he said to me these waters go out toward the eastern region and go down into the Arabah which is a desert.

Then they go toward the sea the Dead Sea being made to flow into the sea and the waters of the sea become fresh. You might wonder well why is it called the Dead Sea? Because it's the most saline water in the world.

It's got so much salt and chemicals in it that you can literally lay on your back and not break the surface tension of the water. Nothing grows there. There's no life in the Dead Sea there's no life on the banks.

Yet in this scene we see a change taking place. And the waters of the sea became fresh. Verse 9 It will come about that every living creature which swarms in every place where the river goes will live. And there will be very many fish for these waters go there and the others become fresh so everything will live where the river goes. And it will come about that fishermen will stand beside it from En Gedi which is on the west side of the Dead Sea to Eneglum which is on the east side of the Dead Sea there will be a place for the spreading of nets.

[17 : 29] Nobody fishes in the Dead Sea today just to be clear. If you threw your net it would just bounce on the surface. It would be like trying to go ice fishing with a net. That doesn't work.

Not that I would ever go ice fishing. Those of you who go ice fishing are crazy. Are crazy. But its swamps and marshes will not become fresh they will be left for salt.

So God preserves a part for the production of salt. By the river on its bank on one side and on the other will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither and their fruit will not fail.

They will bear every month because their water flows from the sanctuary and their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing. So there's three interpretations I'm going to cover this pretty rapidly.

There's three interpretations of how we can take this passage. This is an area of prophecy that is not real clear. And I read a lot this week trying to get my head around it and if one thing was clear is it's not clear.

[18 : 34] I think God does that on purpose. We talked a lot about Jesus allowing the disciples to stay in confusion during our sermon series on Mark. God allows confusion to reign because it forces us to think.

It also allows him to be very creative in the application of a particular piece of scripture. God is very efficient that way. So I think that these three interpretations are equally valid and you'll see why in a second.

So the first one is think about who Ezekiel is speaking to. He's speaking to a Jewish audience that was separate from God. They were headed into exile because of disobedience.

They were objects of God's wrath. As a matter of fact you don't have to turn there but in Ezekiel 43.10 God tells us why he put this boring section in the Bible.

As for you son of man describe the temple to the house of Israel that they may be ashamed of their iniquity and let them measure the plan. Basically he's saying very similar to what Wayne had us do as we went through the Lord's Supper is look at this glorious temple that's in the future.

[19 : 43] This is your future but you got to repent because you're not qualified to enter that gate until there's a change in your life. And so the first audience is the Jewish people and this temple with the river of water flowing down from it is a picture of a future kingdom.

It's the reign of the triumphant king. The temple will be built again. It will be the center of worship for all mankind and the Jews will have it as their home.

And rivers of blessing will flow from it. Some people have argued that's a literal river that God's going to cause to flow down into the Dead Sea.

There's prophecies in another part of the Old Testament about water coming from the Mediterranean to Jerusalem. So that would connect all the way through and they look at it as literal. They look at what the nation of Israel has done since 1948 and they see literal refreshment being brought to the Holy Land.

I'm not going to discount that. I think it's true. I think that's one application of this passage. And there's a future hope for the Jewish people your king will reign.

[20 : 56] The Messiah will come and life will come with his reign. That's a valid interpretation. There's a few things as we talk about God's kingdom that you're going to see apply across each of these interpretations.

first of all as God's kingdom advances there's growth. Think about what I read that little trickle of water in Jerusalem becomes a raging river by the time it gets to the Dead Sea actually pretty quickly.

It's four steps so that's 3,000 it's 6,000 feet just over a mile. It goes from a trickle to a river that you can't get across. And what is accompanied by that beautiful raging river life.

The banks are full of trees. Remember I told you the Ereba is a desert but it will be fruitful year round. The waters of the Dead Sea will suddenly come to life so life and growth goes as God's kingdom advances.

As God's kingdom advances there's healing. That's the picture of the Dead Sea becoming pure where fish can once again swim there. Good fish for eating.

[22 : 08] as God's kingdom advances there's fruit and of course that's symbolized by the fruit and the trees along the edge. So this is something that the Jewish people are looking forward to in their future is these things.

But then there's another application. Turn in your Bibles really quick you should have your fingers there to Revelation chapter 22. We're just going to read a few verses really quickly.

Revelation 22 1 through 3 that and this might sound familiar if you were paying attention when I read Ezekiel 47. Then he showed me a river of the water of life clear as crystal coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb in the middle of its street on either side of the river was a tree of life bearing 12 kinds of fruit yielding its fruit every month and the leaves of the tree were the healing of the nations there will no longer be any curse and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it. The throne of God and the throne of the Lamb will be in it. What's interesting is in Ezekiel I didn't read this portion but as the description of what's going to happen in the future for Israel ends the final phrase of the book of Ezekiel is the name of the city from that day forward shall be the Lord is there.

What is one of the names of Jesus? Emmanuel God with us. what is this? This picture in Revelation it's that same picture God is there but you know what's different between Ezekiel and Revelation?

[24 : 12] Us. Us. The gap that we talked about in Isaiah 61 that Jesus made evident allowed for the river of blessing the people who would receive that blessing to be expanded beyond the Jews to all people.

Remember the last line of the promise to Abraham was all of the nations will be blessed. That's us. We get to be there. So not only is this a Jewish future it's a future for all of us who are in Christ Jesus.

If you name Jesus as your Savior this is your future. this is what you have to look forward to. It's glorious it's wonderful it's blessed it's intimacy with God.

You know there's no lights in that city? If you go into my house you walk in you can say echo that's our device echo lights on and all the lights come on.

We won't have to do that. Do you know why? Why? Because the presence of God will illumine the entire city.

[25 : 26] There's no need for artificial lighting anymore because we will have God himself. We'll be healed we'll be healthy we'll be everything that we're meant to be then. But there's a third interpretation and this is what we're going to bring home and this is what I want you to really remember because the first two are nice they're motivating they're kind of cool to say well if I'm tired I'm feeling myself get older my back is hurting well I got something future to look forward to but does it really matter now?

Really? If my car's not working or my body's falling apart or my kids won't listen does it really matter? Well there's a third interpretation that is that this is a picture of our growth as disciples of Christ as apprentices of Jesus well how do I say that?

Well Jesus said really funny how Jesus looks back on what people thought was their set understanding of what he was saying in the Old Testament and says well yeah sort of but you mostly missed it here let me clarify this is in John chapter 7 verses 37 38 I meant to have you turn there I forgot so you're going to have to listen really well it's only two verses you can do it now on the last day the great day of the feast Jesus was in Jerusalem Jesus stood and cried out saying if anyone is thirsty let him come to me and drink if you're thirsty if you're not satisfied with life if you're hungering and thirsting for righteousness for goodness to be in the world for all the sin and travail to end for the failures of our own bodies everything from the intensely personal to the big picture stuff the suffering of our brothers and sisters in Nigeria you just want it to end you're thirsty if anyone is thirsty let him come to me

Jesus said and drink to look back to Ezekiel 47 he who believes in me as the scripture said from his innermost being will flow rivers of living water that's a look back to Ezekiel now we don't have time to go into the imagery of the river in the Bible but it's rich it speaks of God's presence it speaks of the Holy Spirit working in us through us and emanating out from us it's a picture of fruitfulness of healing of all these good things it's a river now what do we know about rivers they move as we see in Ezekiel the river gets broader it gets deeper it becomes powerful that brothers and sisters is what God expects of us this is where we're going to focus for the last few minutes God's expectation for you is growth not only does that growth not stop when you die it doesn't stop

I don't think all the way into eternity we're going to grow forever continually being made more and more like Jesus total transformation of character from the inside out because even when our sin is washed away gone when we're in heaven there's still room for growth and God is going to grow us but his expectation for us is that we grow and it doesn't stop when our bodies start to break down when we start to get tired when the demands of life of juggling work and family and marriage and friends and our own aging parents and all these demands it never stops because as we grow God is equipping us to handle all those trials and tribulations and actually teaching us through them there are tools in his hands so let's talk about this growth I want to pause for a second just really quick I need to give credit where credit is due what I'm going to go over really fast comes from a couple of books on top of the

[29 : 33] Bible one is a book by a man named Robert Coleman called The Master Plan of Evangelism if you haven't read it get on Amazon buy it not right now because I want you to focus but you need to read that book Robert Coleman did a great service to the church back in the late 50s early 60s he did an exhaustive study of Jesus methodology of discipleship and gave back to the church this is the model this is how Jesus expects us to follow him these are the steps for us to obey the great commission now remarkably most of the church in America at least fails to follow up on that simple book it's like 100 pages it's not even a hard read but that book has really informed my thinking because it's basically just a fleshing out of what's already in the Bible and then there's another book called real life discipleship by Jim Putman he's a pastor up in northern Idaho basically all it does is take Coleman's work and put shoe leather on it and give really practical tools for us as we're growing as disciples and as we mature into being disciple makers so

I highly recommend both of those books you'll be so let's talk about spiritual growth and what God is taking us through and this is going to be really fast we're going from youngest to oldest first of all it's dead you're dead the Bible says if you're not in Christ if you have not believed in him you're dead wait no I'm not nope I got a heartbeat I'm alive no for all practical purposes you're dead you're lost you're without hope and if you're really honest you know it because life's not working it doesn't make sense you can't figure out why it's because you're dead and what you need is to trust in Christ to accept that

Jesus work on the cross accomplished for you something you couldn't accomplish for yourself and to accept the way of life that I'm going to describe in the next few minutes to accept that as this is the way and you repent you turn from the way you were living to the way that God has prescribed for you to live because the kingdom of God is at hand that was the core message that John the Baptist and Jesus taught repent turn the kingdom of God is here that's what you have to do if you're dead and for those of us who are believers God has commissioned us to share that good news you need to be looking for ways to tell people hey excuse me you're dead be more subtle than that but as you direct people to the Lord you're sharing with them the hope that they have no place else and you're the vehicle to bring that to pass so the dead need to be born again they need to be brought to life and they're characterized by ignorance they don't know what they don't know so a person gets saved they come to Christ for me that was late January of 1980

I didn't know anything and so also an infant is also characterized by ignorance an infant needs to be held and to be nurtured and to be taken care of I mean you look at Oscar Oscar gets passed around like a football as different people help to hold him and care for him there's JJ that Andrea and Jeremy and Andrea have and then tell me your daughter's name again Raya Raya needs to be cared for and nurtured that's what spiritual infants need and what happens if you meet my grandson Jesse who's 18 months old he's learned to feed himself not well it looks like we put food into a chipper and sprayed it all over the kitchen but he's eating he's learning words he's also learning opinions but that's what spiritual infancy is like it's growth but it requires the vigilant oversight of a parent who's taking care and bringing that person along giving them what they need they need to learn new truth the old way leads to death the new way leads to life we need to give that to them Jesse would live on a diet of chocolate if he had his way we have to say no dog you have to eat good food you have to eat the right thing that's part of infancy the other part is that they need to learn new habits there are disciplines that we have to practice as Christians not because they earn God's favor but the means God has given for us to grow we need to be people who are in the word regularly like daily for the rest of your life there's not a break you don't read the Bible once check that box and move on it's a lifestyle we need to be people who pray who are looking to God we need to be deeply infused in a community of people who know us more than we want to be known and that we know there's more but that's the basics but an infant needs to learn new habits because the goal of God is growth we don't want them to stay there if an infant stays an infant we get worried we look for human babies to show markers as they grow there's markers as we watch people grow as we watch ourselves grow then there's a child children are characterized by self interest me me me me me my poor grandchildren they're the object of illustration today they keep score

[35 : 22] Sonny got this I get that says Jonah oh and Sonny's not to be outdone she does the same thing they're keeping score it's all about me how many presents are under the tree wait a minute they don't even know math yet but all of a sudden they know that sister's got one more than brother or wait Sonny got a big box and I've only got a little box it's all about me you've met those Christians who think the service is about me this is the consumer mindset of the rank and file of American Christianity all the worship's not good enough it's not it's not hip enough or it's too hip the pastor is too old the pastor's too young the pastor slurs of speech the pastor spits too much who knows the people weren't friendly the people weren't too friendly you just can't win because it's not about winning it's helping them grow up move past self-centeredness a child needs to learn to connect to God they need to learn that God is their father that he is invested in their growth that he wants to help them mature past self-centeredness to discover that there's so much more they also need to be connected to other people this is not a solo enterprise you cannot grow by yourself the person who says oh I don't need to go to church nature is my church

I commune with God out there I read my Bible sorry that doesn't work the Bible clearly teaches it doesn't work you cannot be in isolation you need to be part of a community so we connect to God we connect to others and we connect to your purpose kids start to develop the understanding they're capable of doing stuff they can make things they can take their ideas and bring them to reality they're discovering a capacity John talked about the class on gifts we want to teach people how to exercise their gifts children are beginning to do that then there's a young adult this is the farthest that the vast majority of American Christians get is just to the point of being a young adult because the organized church likes young adults because they're moldable they fill slots they're Sunday school teachers they lead programs but they don't cause us any headaches they're

characterized by a willingness to serve they've become God centered young adults do and they're other centered they've learned what it means to love God vertically and to love others horizontally but they're not quite to the final stage yet they need to get equipped for ministry that's part of the core of Ephesians 4 that we're going to be studying in January they need to be brought along by a spiritual parent to help them really refine their skills and be released into what they're called to be and do and it's time to step into ministry as a young adult and then finally there's a parent spiritual parents like us human parents are characterized by intentionality we know the goal and we build our kids toward it a spiritual parent engages in and models discipling that apprenticeship and we release we really want to release spiritual parents from the burden of leading programs and doing the stuff to actually be disciple makers to be coming alongside those people the young adults to bring them along as well the idea is what Paul said to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2 I'm just going to paraphrase it Paul told Timothy take what I taught you what you learned from me teach it other people who will be able to teach others also God's plan for the church is that each of us teach somebody else who is taught well enough that they can teach somebody else and so it spreads throughout the world so final thoughts and I'm done God expects us to grow closer to him that's the key part of the growth is intimacy with God each of us individually discovering that the closer we get to God the more beautiful everything becomes we become more like him we see the future we understand how he's working the questions about our lives find answers or we're content to trust him without the answers God wants us to grow closer to him Jesus said in John 17 this is eternal life if you sum it all down the life that we have in

Christ is this this is eternal life that they may know you the one true God in Jesus Christ whom you have sent so the first part of growth is closer to God God expects growth if you're on a plateau you need to get off of it and frankly we never live on a plateau we either lose ground or regain ground if you think you're on a plateau you need to look in the mirror and think what do I need to change what do I need to learn what does God have next for me God expects fruit in your life the inner fruit of the fruit of the spirit Galatians 5 but the outer fruit people should respond positively or negatively to the presence of Jesus that you carry with you you should bear fruit along the lines of your gift and this is the hard truth we are in a constant battle against laziness we've got excuses we've got so much on our plates but

[41 : 12] God has called us to grow but the benefit is Ezekiel 47 camp in that this week look at the extravagant description that God gives in Ezekiel 47 and to really put it in contrast get online and look up on YouTube a video tour of the Dead Sea and recognize that the verdant thriving growing garden that's described in Ezekiel 47 is that image that you're going to see of death and barrenness that's the work that God is doing in your soul that's the work that God wants to do in your soul and the challenge to you as we wrap up we're done is to look in the mirror and to say God what do you want have for me what do you want me to do do do ask for help ask for tools ask

God to direct you to people who are further along in the journey with you who can help bring you along God loves those types of questions but it's a tough question looking in the mirror is never fun and by the way this is the mirror let's pray God thank you that you have invited us into intimate relationship with you that we have life and hope the expectation that our lives will bear fruit and have meaning and significance that we will have intimacy with you and God I pray that this look at Ezekiel would whet our appetites to go further up and further in with you to get to know you more intimately and to follow you with all of our heart soul mind and strength to be falling more deeply in love with you loving other people and then bringing others along with us and making disciples God we want to be a disciple making church pray this in Jesus name amen