

Fil-Am Community Church
Pastor David Bennett
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Life's Healing Choices: Part 7

“THE GROWTH CHOICE”

Good morning Fil-Am, it is so good to see you here this morning. I just wanted to say thank you for your support, both here on Sunday as we go through Life's Healing Choices, as well as each Home Group for doing the same.

The series we are going through can be particularly challenging, because if done correctly we are looking into our painful, checkered past.

- ✓ We're looking at our **Persistent Sins**.
- ✓ We've been looking at our **Personal Weaknesses**
- ✓ **Hurts, Hang-ups** and **Habits** that gnaw at us.

The Sermon series based on Life's Healing Choices is broken down into 8 sermons which coincide with the word **RECOVERY**

R = Realize that I am not God, I am powerless to control my tendency to do the wrong thing and my life is unmanageable (“**Blessed are those who know they are spiritually poor**”)

E = Earnestly believe that God exists, that I matter to him, and that he has the power to help me recover. (“**Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted**”)

C = Consciously choose to commit all my life and will to Christ's care and control. (“**Blessed are the meek**”)

O = Openly examine and confess my faults to God, to myself, and to someone I trust (“**Blessed are the pure in heart**”)

V = Voluntarily submit to every change God wants to make in my life and humbly ask Him to remove my character defects. (“**Blessed are those whose greatest desire is to do what God requires**”)

E = Evaluate all my relationships; Offer forgiveness to those who have hurt me and make amends for harm I've done to others except when to do so would harm them or others. (“**Blessed are the merciful**” “**Happy are the peacemakers**”)

R = Reserve a daily time with God for self-examination, Bible readings and prayer in order to know God and His will for my life and to gain the power to follow His will.

Y = Yield myself to God to be used to bring this Good News to others, both by my example and by my words. (“**Blessed are those who are persecuted because they do what God requires**”)

The message today is about how to **finish the race**.

The former President of the Moody Bible Institute, William Clubertson said, “*It is important to start right, but it is imperative to end well.*”

Friends, if you’ve ever been to a marathon race, you know that there’s a crowd at the start but it thins out at the end. A lot of people start off great in life. But they flame out. They never finish the race.

If you go to a marathon, at the starting point, everybody looks great. All their suits are clean, new shoe. They’ve got a lot of energy. It’s a party celebration at the start of a marathon.

If you’ve ever been to the end of a marathon it’s a different story. People are straggling across the line. They’re sweaty, they smell, they’re dirty, maybe they’ve got their skin burned, their number’s been torn off. It’s a totally different picture.

Friends, you don’t get the gold medal for starting the race. You only get the gold medal for ending it. I want you, as one of your pastors, as one of your brothers in the Lord, as your friend, I want so badly for you to finish well.

Today I want to talk to you about how to end the race well this is what we will be talking about today the Growth Choice...

The Growth Choice says this:

- ✓ I reserve a **daily time** with God for Bible reading, self-examination and prayer in order to know God (that’s the first thing)
- ✓ And **his will** for my life (that’s the second thing)
- ✓ To gain the **power** to follow his will (that’s the third thing)

Spiritual growth is a choice. Spiritual growth is intentional.

You have to choose to say,

- ✓ I'm not going to be **this way** next year.
- ✓ I'm going to be **different** by next year.
- ✓ I'm going to have to **let go** of some of those painful past things.
- ✓ I'm going to have to let go of some of those **persistent sins**.
- ✓ I'm going to let go of some of those **personal weaknesses** and
- ✓ I'm going to be **better** than I was last year."

But that's a choice. You must choose to continue growing. Growth is a continual process. If you're not growing, you're dying.

The Bible says this in 2 Peter 3:18 "*Continue to grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*"

Today we're going to look at **how to continue your growth**, how to maintain the momentum you started.

- ✓ How do I **maintain** my momentum?
- ✓ How do I complete the course, **finish the race**?

The Bible tells us there are **seven things** that we need to do to continue in the faith.

1. First, I need to fix a daily time with God.

I know many of you would say, I would love to but just can't find the time...Look at it this way how many hours a day do we devote to shows on TV? Netflix, Hulu and all the other programs? How many adulteries did we watch last week? How many illicit affairs, how many murders? How many did we watch with our children?

Now answer me this; How many chapters of the Bible did we read last week?

Let me see a hand of all the married couples or even those that are dating, have dated or even thinking about dating?

Now try this, try going a week without talking to your spouse or girlfriend and now tell me how that works out for you?

Anyone in a relationship will tell you that it's **not healthy**, but we, you and I do it to God all the time...

It says in James 4:8, *"Draw near to God and he will draw near to you."*

Drawing near to God involves daily meeting with him, talking to him and he to you. As we do this we build a deeper and deeper relationship with him, the most important relationship of all.

All throughout Scripture we're taught that you have to be connected with God in order to have the life of God in your life.

I want to tell you personally, this is still one of the hardest thing to be consistent in my daily time with God.

Because everything fights against it! Why? Because Satan knows if he can keep you disconnected, you're worthless.

- ✓ You have **no power**.
- ✓ You have **no defense**.
- ✓ You have **no strength** against his temptations.

The Bible says in 1 John 3:6 *"Everyone who lives in union with Christ does not continue to sin."*

What does that mean? It means when I'm connected with Christ he gives me the...

- ✓ The **Power**,
- ✓ The **Ability**,
- ✓ The **Effort**,
- ✓ The **Desire**
- ✓ **Everything** I need to defeat the enemy...

So in order to continue in faith you need to

- ✓ Fix a daily time with God, I also have to...

2. If I'm going to keep on making it to the finish line, I must fill my mind with Scripture.

You know, if you go without food you start feeling a little weak.

- ✓ You go a little bit longer, your mind starts getting a little **groggy**.
- ✓ You go a little longer and you start feeling **cranky**.
- ✓ If you go even longer without food you realize that you can't function properly

The same is true with God's Word.

- ✓ This is soul food; it is the food for your soul.

The Bible says, "*Man shall not live by food alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.*" (Matthew 4:4)

This is as necessary to your soul as food is to your body. If you don't get the Word, into your soul, you're going to start feeling lethargic and cranky and weak and realize you can't function properly.

You say, "But I come to church every week." That would be like saying I'm going to have a banquet every Sunday and fast the next six days. If the only spiritual input you get in your life is the weekend message, you're having a banquet once a week and fasting the rest of the week.

Whatever you put into your body and into your mind is what's going to come out.

We call it, garbage in, garbage out. Whatever you put into yourself is what's going to come out.

The same is true in your heart and in your mind. You put garbage in your mind, and there's plenty of it out there, that's what's going to come out in your life. If you put soul food in your mind, that's what's going to come out in your life and personality.

- ✓ You can put in poison – like violence and pornography and all kinds of evil things.
- ✓ Or you could put in the Word of God.

Philippians 4:8-9, "*Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me, put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*"

James 1:25 *“The truly happy people are those who carefully **study** God’s perfect law that makes people free, and they **continue** to study it. They do **not forget** what they heard, but they **obey** what God’s teaching says.”*

This is the secret of happiness.

- ✓ You hear the Word of God
- ✓ You study the Word of God
- ✓ You do the Word of God
- ✓ You obey the Word of God
- ✓ You don’t forget the Word of God
- ✓ You memorize the Word of God

The Bible says in Romans 12:1-2 *“Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”*

How do you renew your mind? Put more positive content in than the negative. Fill your mind with the Word of God.

Every time you put a positive thought, the Word of God on the one side, the scale tips. You’ve got to get more on that side than the other. Eventually when you get enough truth in your mind, then...

- ✓ All of a sudden you’re **changed**.
- ✓ All of a sudden you’re **ready** to face the world;
- ✓ you’re ready to take on **tomorrow**;

So in order to continue in faith you need to

- ✓ Fix a **daily time** with God,
- ✓ Fill my mind with his **Word**, I also have to...

3. The third thing I have to do to keep on growing is focus on my goal, not my habit.

Focus on my goal, not my habit. When I say habit, I’m talking about those habits, hurts, hang-ups, those sins, those weaknesses, the failures.

The things in your life that you don’t like. What I’m saying is, if you want to grow you have to focus on what you want, not what you don’t want.

Samuel Johnson said, *"The chains of habit are generally too small to be felt until they are too strong to be broken."* Another way of looking at it is by a poem quoted by Margate Thatcher...

Watch your **thoughts**; they become your **words**,
Watch your **words**; they become your **actions**,
Watch your **actions**; they become **habit**,
Watch your **habits**; they become **character**,
Watch your **character**; it becomes your **destiny**!

Stop focusing on your past. Bad habits are like comfortable beds, easy to get into but hard to get out of.

If you want to grow, you must focus on the future

You focus on your goal not your habits.

This is what Paul talked about in Philippians, 3:12, *"Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me."*

You're always looking at your past. You're driving looking in the rear-view mirror. You're going to crash.

Growth is a curvy road.

- ✓ The road to recovery is **jagged**.
- ✓ The road to recovery is a lot of **twists and turns**.

The Bible doesn't promise a **temptation-free** life.

It promises a **victorious life**, which means, the Bible says in Galatians 5:16, *"Those who walk in the Spirit will not fulfill the lust of the flesh."*

That doesn't mean they don't have the lust of the flesh. It means they don't **fulfill** it. How do you do that?

So in order to continue in faith you need to

- ✓ Fix a **daily time** with God,
- ✓ Fill my mind with his **Word**,

- ✓ Focus on the **goal** and not the **habit**, I also have to...

4. I face and forsake my failures quickly.

You're going to stumble in life. But the key is not trying to live a perfect life. The key is to face and forsake my failures quickly. I don't cover them up and I don't blame others and I don't excuse myself and I own up to it.

How do you do that? But one of the ways is by **personal self-examination**. I'm not going to go into this but there are three ways you want to examine yourself.

Spot check, how am I feeling right now? There's a daily examination where, like at the end of the day you go, how did I do today?

It's like looking at your full length spiritual mirror and seeing everything, the good and the bad...

In steps, to recovery and in growth, there should be an annual checkup, where you do kind of a spring-cleaning.

The Bible says, in Lamentations 3:40, *Let us examine our ways and let us test them and return to the Lord.*"

The Bible says this in Psalms 103 *"He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases. He keeps me from the grave and blesses me with love and mercy."*

Not criticizes me with judgment and scorn. He blesses me with love and mercy. God gives me what I need, not what I deserve.

The Bible says, *"God is the healer of the brokenhearted."* When my heart is brokenhearted over something I've done again, God says, I'm here to heal you. The Bible says that God is our healer if we come to him.

If I'm going to make it to the finish line, if I'm going to be all God wants me to be,

- ✓ Fix a **daily time** with God,
- ✓ Fill my mind with his **Word**,
- ✓ Focus on the **goal** and not the **habit**
- ✓ **Forsake** and forgive and face my failures quickly, I also need to...

5. I have to flee temptation.

I think that we all understand what temptation is. There is a story told about a little boy in a grocery store that I think illustrates the nature of temptation.

The boy was standing near an open box of peanut butter cookies. “Now then, young man,” said the grocer as he approached the young man. “What are you up to?” “Nothing,” replied the boy: “Nothing.” “Well it looks to me like you were trying to take a cookie.”

“You’re wrong, mister, **I’m trying not to!**” That’s temptation!

Saints, it is not a sin to be tempted. Don’t feel guilty about temptation. It’s only a sin to give in to temptation.

The Bible says, “*Jesus was tempted in all points like as we, yet he sinned not.*” Temptation is not a sin. It’s what you do with it.

What you do with those thoughts, temptations determines whether it’s good or bad, right or wrong, sin or righteousness. Don’t be intimidated by temptation. Just “I know where that one came from.

Martin Luther said, “You can’t keep the birds from flying over your head but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair.”

James 4:7, “*Resist the Devil and he **WILL** flee.*”

Some people say “I’ve been a Christian for a while now so why would I have that temptation?” Let me let you in on a little secret.

The closer you get to God, the harder Satan is going to fight you. Why? Because he knows the closer you get to God, the less control he has over you.

There are two things you need to stay away from: tempting **situations** and tempting **associations**.

Tempting situations – stay away from circumstances.

Tempting associations – stay away from people that tempt you.

If you don't want to get stung you stay away from the bees. John Baker says, "You hang around the barber shop long enough, you're going to get a haircut."

Or as we have said in **IMPACT** Class, if you hang out with drug dealers and strippers you are going to make bad decisions.

When temptations come in to your mind,

- ✓ Ask yourself what settings are you in when you fall? **Avoid them.**
- ✓ What props do you have that support your sin? **Eliminate them.**
- ✓ What people are you usually with? **Avoid them.**

Saints if you have a problem with alcohol, you don't go to the bar to eat a sandwich. You stay away from it.

- ✓ You need to avoid tempting situations.
- ✓ You need to avoid tempting associations.

1 Corinthians 15:33, "*Don't be fooled. Bad companions ruin good character.*"

If you have friends that it is easier for them to pull you down than for you to pull them up. You might want to rethink that relationship!

When Joseph was tempted by a woman in the Old Testament, he left his cloak, his clothes and **RAN**.

He didn't stand there and argue, you really don't want this. I don't want this."

So get out of the situation.

- ✓ I'm not going to have that drink...
- ✓ I'm not going to read that magazine...
- ✓ I'm not going to watch that channel...
- ✓ I'm not going to lose my temper." No.

If I'm going to make it to the finish line I must...

- ✓ Fix a daily time with God,
- ✓ Fill my mind with his Word,
- ✓ Focus on the goals and not the habits
- ✓ Forsake and forgive and face my failures instantly, quickly.
- ✓ Flee temptation, and I have to...

6. If I'm going to make it to the finish line, if I'm going to grow continuously, I must form an ongoing support group.

I don't have to cover this a lot because this is the life blood of the Home groups. However, there are two reasons why you need to be in a Home group.

First, is **prayer**, and second, **encouragement**.

The Bible says, in 2nd Corinthians 1:10-11 "...*We are confident that God will continue to rescue us, since you are also joining to help us when you pray for us.*"

Do you have **anybody** praying for you?

Are you **praying** for anybody?

You also need encouragement. Hebrews 10:25, "*We should not stop gathering together with other believers, as some of you are doing. Instead, we must continue to encourage each other...*"

You need continuous encouragement.

If you don't like your home group, maybe it's the wrong group, maybe the wrong combination. Maybe the wrong day, you need something else.

You don't have to stay in your home group. I'm telling you as one of your pastors. You don't have to stay in that home group. But you should be in **A GROUP**.

Take the example of a fire when all the logs are together they burn and help heat each other and all can feel there warmth, kick one of the logs that is lit out of the fire and see what happens to it...

It will smolder out, it will not survive all by itself. What happens to a baby gazelle when separated from the pack? You become too easy prey when you are by yourself.

This leads to our last step...

- ✓ I have to fix a daily time with God,
- ✓ I have to fill my mind with his Word,
- ✓ I have to focus on the goals not habits
- ✓ I have to forsake and forgive and face my failures instantly, quickly.
- ✓ I have to flee temptation
- ✓ If I'm going to grow I need to be in a support group And finally...

7. Follow Christ to the finish line.

One of the great promises of the Bible is Philippians 1:6, NIV), *“Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”*

Philippians 1:6, Amplified Bible

“And I am convinced and sure of this very thing, that He Who began a good work in you will continue until the day of Jesus Christ [right up to the time of His return], developing [that good work] and perfecting and bringing it to full completion in you.”

What God starts he finishes. You may be feeling a little discouraged right now. But I have a verse for you...

Galatians 6:9 *“Don't get tired of doing what is good. Don't get discouraged and give up, for we will reap a harvest of blessing at the appropriate time!”*

God brought you here today to say this to you. **Don't give up.** He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion on the day of Jesus Christ.

We would all like to be able to say those famous words in 2 Timothy 4:7. *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”*

Or even better yet to hear the words, recorded in Matthew 25:23, *“Well done good and faithful servant...”*

Let us Pray....