

## Welcome

Last summer, I started a garden. For my first real attempt, I feel like it went pretty well. I started several months ahead of time, building a compost pile and marking out exactly where I wanted to grow herbs, tomatoes, peppers, and okra. I sought out the advice of successful gardeners, I carefully selected seeds and plants and I watered them regularly.

Honestly, I spent a lot of time just staring out the windows into my backyard at my plants just thinking about them. I will neither confirm nor deny that I spoke to them like they were listening. They received a lot of my attention and I enjoyed it immensely. From what I understand, tomatoes are a bit fickle in our hot Texas heat and I was able to grow and harvest them before they were all stolen by animals. I was pretty darn proud of myself.

Let me tell you about my garden this summer. Things are growing even better than they were last summer. One might even call it lush. Lush and verdant. Plants are growing tall and strong.

Unfortunately, there aren't any vegetables and herbs growing well in my garden this summer like there were last summer, but everything else seems to be thriving. Let me show you a picture.

[**Garden**] Yes, those aren't vegetables, they're just weeds. I didn't pay attention to my garden, but it doesn't mean nothing was growing. Something was growing all right, it just wasn't vegetables. This summer, I had a bumper crop of weeds.

How often do we reflect on our lives as another season comes to a close and ask ourselves, did I see any growth? Did I reach the goals I had for myself? Am I in a better place than I was several months ago? This summer preaching series called "Rooted," we've learned about how we can know God better through four ways: scripture, experience, reason, and tradition. Our pastor JR. Forasteros, his friend Heather Gerbsch Daughtery and members of our Catalyst preaching team: Debbie Reese, Josh Mounce, Tim Basselin, and Ashley Bekkerus all shared with us God's word and steps we could take to grow closer to God. Did you feel like you were growing? Did you notice?

The truth is, we're always growing something, whether we're paying attention to it or not. God is always growing something in us, whether or not we take the time to notice. Today, let's take an inventory of what is growing!

## MESSAGE

[**Series Master Slide**] We're coming to the end of our current series called "Rooted." This whole summer here at Catalyst, we asked ourselves, "how do we know God? How do we understand our purpose as God's people?"

We have four major sources of knowing God: Scripture, the record of God's interactions with us throughout history; Reason, our ability to think and learn and discover; Tradition, how others on the journey of faith have known God; and Experience, what we learn about God from our lives.

I'm inviting you this morning to reflect on your relationship with God. I want to show you this morning how to recognize what God has done for you, and *in* you, this summer.

We started our series with discussing experience, which is about exploring how we can know God better. JR asked us, "how do we know if our experience of God is right and good? After all, our perspective *is* limited. We're not infallible." That's why we need each other. We looked at nurturing our personal experience with God and our understanding of God through our relationships. Spiritual practices are a vehicle to a friendship with God, so also is our friendship with one another a vehicle to our friendship with God. Experience of God draws us closer into a community with each other. And it's by living, working and sharing together we receive the fullest, best picture of God.

We explored tradition through our understanding of how the history of the church is a part of how God is transforming our lives. Some faith traditions say *sola scriptura*, which is a Latin phrase that means "Scripture alone". The phrase goes back to the Father of the Reformation, Martin Luther. They mean Scripture is the only source of faith. Here at Catalyst, we're part of a faith tradition that says instead *prima scriptura*, or Scripture is primary (as opposed to alone). We recognize that, while the Bible is the main source of our faith, Jesus speaks to us and invites us to know him through other channels as well. In this series we took the time to look at the church at different geographical scales: the worldwide Christian church, our denomination of the church of the Nazarene within the Christian church, and our community of faith within our local church- Catalyst. From our little gathering this morning to the Christian Church across the globe, we see how sharing in the faith experiences of others helps us know God better.

After that, we explored how Reason invites us to know God, so we might have a deeper relationship. Reason is not the enemy of faith. Reason enhances our faith. God created us that way. JR talked to us about how faith and science can exist at the same time, in the same space, and we can use reason to explain our experience of faith. Tim Basselin talked to us about how our experience with mystery and doubt is an opportunity to know God more. Josh Mounce talked to us about our own worldview and how our relationship with God can help us transform how we see the world and our purpose in it.

Last, but most certainly not least, we looked at how we know God through Scripture. We saw that the Bible is a collection of books inspired by God, which means both that it's fully a product of human authors and fully the books God wants us to have to shape our faith and ultimately invite us into a deeper relationship with the author of Scripture. Some of us struggle with reading the Bible. It's a very old text, written to an ancient and unfamiliar culture. There's some really weird stuff in it. A couple of weeks ago JR gave us some tools for how to ready the Bible So how do we read literarily rather than just literally. Not many of us have graduate degrees in theology like JR, so it was comforting when he reminded us that it's okay to trust ourselves. We may not be theological experts, but that doesn't mean

scripture is unsafe in our hands. We have the resources we can reference and the Holy Spirit to guide us. Ultimately, we have to read the Bible humbly. It's okay not to know everything and have questions. If you're not sure, ask questions. Last Sunday night, we spent some time here together asking questions and understanding scripture together.

For four months we talked about how we can know God through Experience, Tradition, Reason, and Scripture. So, I want to ask you today, do you know God better? Are you in a different place with your faith than you were four months ago?

[Scripture Slide] Maybe you can point to something specific as evidence that you're in a better place than you were last Spring. Here we can look to a passage of scripture to inform us on what this might look like. Open up your Bible to the book of Matthew, chapter 7, verses 15-20. If you borrowed a Bible from the back table, it's on page \_\_\_\_\_. If you don't have a bible of your own, you're welcome to keep this one as a gift.

These verses are part of a collection we call the Sermon on the Mount, which was delivered by Jesus to a large gathering of people. His sermon covered several topics and was written down in such a way that it could be memorized, which was important in a time when literacy and books were extremely rare.

In this particular section, we see Jesus using a metaphor of fruitfulness to help us understand how we can look for evidence of a close relationship with God. We begin in chapter 7 verse 15:

**"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. -- Matthew 7:15-20**

In this passage, Jesus is talking about the religious leaders of the day who were bent on excluding others who were different from them from having a relationship with God. Their exclusiveness was the fruit they produced, and it wasn't fruit at all, it was thorns.

Thus, by your fruit, how do others recognize you? "Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? Are you a grapevine or a thorn bush? Are you a fig tree or are you a thistle? Are you growing fruit that is nourishing and good for others like a fruit tree or you just a thorny and spiky little pain in the you know what?"

Think about my garden this summer. Vegetable plants yield vegetables that are edible and nourishing. My bumper crop of weeds isn't really doing anything but spreading its seeds into my neighbor's lawns, taking up all the sunlight and water so nothing actually desirable can grow.

Our lives can be like this too. We're always growing something, whether we're paying attention or not. We're keeping a space open for the Holy Spirit to fill us, we're watering it with reading scripture, spiritual practices, and positive relationships and producing spiritual "fruit" OR we're letting that space be filled by something that grows quickly, but doesn't really produce anything worth having, like a garden full of weeds.

[Scripture Slide 2] So, what does nourishing fruit look like? We find this in the book of Galatians, chapter 5, verses 22-23.

**But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. -- Galatians 5:22-23**

The Good News is, God sent Jesus and the Holy Spirit to transform our lives. We may feel like weeds, but God can make us into plants that produce nourishing fruit. We only have to accept it. God is desperately pursuing a relationship with you, all you have to do is respond with, "yes."

And then we experience real growth and we cultivate the good fruits: we are loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle and self-controlled. These are the fruits of the spirit. These are the metrics by which we measure our spiritual transformation.

We respond to God's invitation and we seek to grow closer to God through reading and studying scripture, our experiences, our ability to reason and our church traditions.

Let me talk about scripture first. One of my favorite things about being a part of this preaching team is the opportunity to read and interpret the Word with others. It's a collaborative process. We read the same verses and then talk about their significance. Listening to others think through the sermon outlining process helps me look at scripture in fresh new ways. You don't have to be on our Catalyst preaching team to share the reading of scripture with others. We occasionally discuss passages of scripture in our C-Group when we meet to talk about the sermon from the Sunday before. I really like hearing how the scripture and message was meaningful to others. Reading scripture is also a spiritual practice. What's important for us to remember with scripture as a spiritual practice is that we're not reading for information. We're reading to be transformed, to allow God to speak to us through the Scriptures. That's not how we're used to reading, so in our spiritual practices guide, which you can pick up in the foyer, we outline a method called Sacred Reading that helps us meditate on God's words the way the Scriptures encourage us to.

Another thing I really enjoy is hearing about how others experience God. It helps me understand how I experience God for myself. We need to share our experiences of God because we're small, finite creatures. We can't figure out God on our own. Especially when we consider that God has been at work in human history since the dawn of time, it'd be foolish to think that any single person is the first person to understand God fully and completely. Which is why we need each other. We know God better by learning from each other. I experience God through my friendships one conversation at a time, hearing

about how God is working in their lives, even if they're not a particularly religious person, it's amazing to see the Holy Spirit at work, helping people transform their lives and turn disappointments and heartaches into blessings and new opportunities to share love.

Both Josh Mounce and Tim Basselin talked to us about how we use reason to make sense of our relationship with God. JR also helped us reconcile faith and science and showed us that we don't have to check our brains at the door when we worship at Catalyst. Tim showed us how times that seem mysterious, or without logic or sense, are opportunities to grow closer to God in unexpected ways. Josh reminded us that there are times in our life that are not mysterious at all. When we are quite certain we know exactly how the world works and then God shows how God's Kingdom turns everything we think we know on its head.

I was especially moved when Josh said,

*"The world says live for yourself  
God says live for me and serve others  
The world says money and people bring happiness  
God says I will bring you deep, pure joy  
The world says YOLO  
God says this is just part of your eternal life  
The world says to bury your enemies  
God says to love them  
The world says that your job is who you are, your purpose  
God says that you are not defined by your work but by who I say you are  
The world says to fear people you don't know  
God say to greet strangers with love and hospitality  
The world says get as much as you can while you can  
God says I will provide everything you need  
The world says truth is what you make it  
God says I am the way, the truth, and the life and in me you will find your purpose"*

In addition to all this, we use the tradition of the church to understand how we can have a deeper relationship with God. Across the whole earth, we join with others as the people of God, in every nation, from every people, in every language all over the world. We are one giant spiritual family, brothers and sisters from every corner of the globe.

The global church helps us know God better. Because knowing someone's family helps us know them better.

We learned how Catalyst Church is part of a denomination, or specific category, of the Christian church, called the Nazarene church, which started over 100 years ago. Of course, you don't have to be Nazarene or know what a Nazarene is, to be part of Catalyst. But you should know that, because we're Nazarene,

we pay special attention to what God is doing today. We expect the Holy Spirit to be changing us. We want to look more like Jesus tomorrow than we do today.

And it means we take seriously what Jesus is doing in the world. It means we care about racism, immigration, equality. Our denomination cares about the world, about justice and peace for everyone.

And locally, Debbie Reese reminded us about the significance of our spiritual family here at Catalyst. Church - we are a group of people that have been brought together for a certain purpose. Catalyst is more than just this building. It's this assembly of individuals who are willing to participate in one another's lives- to share meals together, to worship together, to come together for prayer- to learn how to pray.

Last year, I had a great garden, but I couldn't get tomatoes. Now, I have this weed pile, and you know what grew out there anyway? Big, beautiful ripe tomatoes. And I didn't even realize it. I was so discouraged by the weeds, I didn't take time to notice that my garden actually did produce some fruit. When I finally did go out to get a closer look. The tomatoes were all shriveled up and inedible.

I asked you if you can see growth in your relationship with God. Maybe you can point to specific examples- time you've set aside to come to church on Sundays and worship together, the time you spent reading scripture, moments spent in prayer, and the relationships you've cultivated with others- that quality time spent with friends and family and time you spent getting to know people who are not like you.

Maybe you can't point to any specific growth. But just like my garden, just because you didn't notice it, doesn't mean it wasn't happening. Think back prayerfully on your summer. Where have you seen the fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life? When were you moved to love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control in ways you weren't before?

Maybe you aren't so sure. Maybe you're sitting here this morning feeling less like a fig tree and more like a thistle. Instead of producing fruit that nourishes others, you're just sort of existing and poking anyone who gets too close to you. Just because you're not cultivating fruit doesn't mean nothing is growing.

One really great way to initiate growth and maintain it is through participating in C-Groups. They start up this week! It's not too late to sign up! In C-Groups, you can spend time in scripture, prayer, learning the traditions of the church and using your God-given reason to understand your faith. There is something especially powerful in getting to know a small group of people and letting them get to know you. They can help you recognize the fruit you are producing.

Friends, our lives are gardens and we're all growing something. Will you be intentional about being deeply rooted in your relationship with God? Will you give the Holy Spirit space to produce that fruit in your life our world needs?

**COMMUNION + Examen:**

[Communion Slide] We come to the table because Jesus sets a place for us. We don't earn a place at this table. It's not our ability, but God's grace that brings us here. To be fruitful, we only have to accept God's invitation.

Jesus invites us to share a meal him, the same meal he ate with his disciples the night before he was killed. At that meal, he broke bread and gave it to us. He said, "Take this and eat it. It's my body, broken for you."

After the meal was finished, he gave them the cup and said, "This is my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sin. Drink it all."

You don't have to be a member of Catalyst to receive community with us today. If you're willing to say Yes to God's invitation, you're welcome to the table.

Before we come, I'm going to give lead us in a Prayer of Examen. I'm going to give you time to reflect in prayer on some questions, and then I'll pray for us.

1. How has God been at work in your life during this series?
2. What fruit of the Spirit do you see in your life?
3. What is God calling me to this Fall?

**Assignment + Blessing:**

Thank you to all of you who support Catalyst through your giving and serving. Thank you for making our ministry possible!

If you're a guest with us, thank you again for worshipping with us. If you're looking to get connected to a new congregation, sign up for our Newcomers' Lunch. The next one is October 13. It's right after this, and in 45 minutes, we tell you who Catalyst is and how to get connected. If you want to sign up, use the box at the top of the tear-off.

Now, as you're going, have at least one conversation with someone this week about what God has been doing in your life in the last few months. That can be at C-Group or over coffee or whatever. But make a point to do it.

Catalyst, let's be a people who pay attention to how God is working in our lives and the lives of each other. Let's celebrate the God who is with us, producing fruit in our lives that is for the good of our world. Go in the grace and peace of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit!