

## A SERMON PREACHED IN UNIONVILLE

April 23, 2023

Grow Up!

### Scripture: Ephesians 4: 11-16

1. I recently ran into a family from DRC, my previous church. I hadn't seen them for over seven years. Their daughter who was just a little tike when I left Delmar was there with them. What a difference 7 years makes in a child! She was so tall, so grown up.
  - a. Not hiding my shock, I blurted out, "Holy cow! Look at you! How you have grown!" Then joking, I said, "How'd you do it? How'd you get so tall!"
  - b. She looked at me sheepishly, shrugged her shoulders and said, "It just happened."
  - c. Our physical growing "just happens." We can't stop what time does to our bodies (both growing up and wearing down). Physical maturity "just happens."
  - d. But that is not true of our spiritual growth. Spiritual maturity doesn't "just happen." Our maturing as Christian people of faith takes an effort on our part. We can't be passive about it. If we want to grow, if we desire to mature and deepen our relationship with our God, and go deeper into our faith, we have to invest our time, energy and effort into it. We have to be pro-active. We have to have "skin" in our spiritual game.
  - e. But why should we? Why grow? Why would we want to make such an investment in our personal spiritual growth?
  - f. From a practical standpoint, it's because most of the problems in our lives most likely come from spiritual immaturity. When we're not spiritually mature, we make dumb decisions. We build our decisions based on how we feel, which is a terrible basis for making decisions. "I just feel like doing it." The problem is that your feelings are wrong a lot of the time and you're manipulated by your moods.

- g. Mature people make decisions based on truth, not feelings. So many of the problems in our world today, happen because of immaturity. The people don't know how to do what's wise, how to do what's mature.
  - h. It is possible to grow old and not ever grow up. You know as well as I do, that there are a lot of old people who are spiritually and emotionally immature. They never grew up. They grew old without growing up.
  - i. The Bible tells us that growth is God's will for our lives. In our lesson today: Ephesians Chapter 4 says this: *"We're not meant to remain as children at the mercy of every wind of teaching..."* In other words, you just fall for anything when you're immature. *"Instead we're meant to hold firmly to the truth in love, and to grow up in every way into Christ."*
  - j. We're not meant to remain as children but we're meant to grow up, the operative phrase there is **"GROW UP."** We're to grow up in Christ.
2. That's what I want to talk about today: Our growing up in Christ. Think of this as a foundation to the focus on prayer that we are just beginning in our Tuesday Bible Study Group. We are embarking on that journey into prayer as a specific and practical way to grow up – to deepen our faith experience.
- a. It could be said that prayer is one of – if not the – most important tool in our spiritual tool box to build spiritual maturity in our lives.
  - b. So even if you may have already decided, "No, I don't want to participate in that "prayer thing" on Tuesday afternoons." Too bad, because you're going to get doses of it for the next several Sunday's that I am here. My sermons will be designed to underscore what we will be talking about in the class.
  - c. And today I just want to underscore how important the goal of this prayer focus really is: And what is that goal? **Our spiritual growth.**
  - d. If spiritual maturity doesn't "just happen," then how does it? How do we grow spiritually? I want to list a few ways.
3. **First: We grow when we prayerfully feed on God's Word ("The Bread of Life.)**
- a. We grow when we feed on God's Word. The Bible, is your soul food. You can't be spiritually healthy unless you feed on the truth. Feed on the Word of God.

- b. Think about this: What kind of health would you have if every Sunday morning you ate this giant Sunday brunch buffet and just gorged yourself with all this food and the rest of the week you ate nothing? It wouldn't work too well, would it?
  - c. In the same way it would harm your spiritual health if all you get of spiritual truth is what you get on Sunday. That's not enough. You've got to eat a little bit every day. You've got to feed your soul, not just once a week going to church, you've got to feed your soul a little bit every day – or you'll be malnourished. You're not going to have the strength that you need in order to do what God wants to do in your life.
  - d. In Matthew 4:4, Jesus says: "People need more than bread for their life..." They need peanut butter and jelly too. No, that's not what he said. Okay. *"People need more than bread for their life; they must feed on the Word of God."* That's what God wants you to do - to feed on it a little bit every day.
  - e. In this unfolding focus on prayer, we want to help you develop that daily habit of feeding on the Word: whether it's five, 10, 15 minutes a day.
4. Now, how do you do that? How do you feed on the Word of God?
- a. Here I want to share with you Rick Warren's "Hand Illustration." It's five ways and then the palm is the sixth way to get a grasp on the Word of God.
  - b. They teach this at the Saddleback Church. Your hand represents six ways to get into God's Word.
    - i) **Hear** it, that's your pinky finger. **Read** it, that's your ring finger. **Study** it, that's your middle finger. **Memorize** it, and then **meditate** on it. Meditate means to seriously think about it, and the palm is to **apply it in your life**.
    - ii) Each finger adds to the strength of your grip on God's Word. If all you do, the only spiritual input you get is by hearing, like you come to church on Sunday, that's the only time you hear the Word of God, then you only have a grip like this (your pinky finger – not so strong). Satan can steal the Word from you very easily.

- (a) Why? We forget 95 percent of everything we hear within 72 hours. That depresses me as a pastor. By Wednesday, you will have forgotten everything I said unless you happen to write it down, (which happily some of you who have the devotional book for these 40 days are doing).
- (b) If you hear the Word of God, and then you read it a little bit every day, you've got a better grip. Each action, each discipline – study, memorize, meditate – makes your grip on the Word stronger. Then you can live it – apply it.
- iii) That's what our focus on prayer is going to do for the next several weeks. We're going to learn how to hear, read, study, memorize, meditate, and apply the Word of God, specifically in the context of prayer.
- iv) These are some habits that we're going to teach you how to do this so you get a good grip on God's Word. And when you get a good grip on God's Word, God will have a good grip on you. And you will have a good grip on life itself.
- v) That's the first principle of spiritual growth – we grow when we immerse ourselves in God's Word.

**5. The second way we grow spiritually: We grow when we develop spiritual habits.**

- a. I cannot over estimate with you the importance of our building good habits in our life. If you build good habits in your life, you're going to have good character. If you have good character, you're going to have a great destiny. Your habits determine what you are and what are you determines where you go in life.
- b. Your character is the sum total of your habits. You can't say for instance, "I'm a kind person. I have the character quality of kindness" unless you're always kind, unless it's habitual to you. It's your habit to be kind. If you're only kind 50 percent of the time, you're not a kind person.
- c. If you say, "Well, I have integrity. I'm honest." If you're only honest 25 percent of the time, you don't have integrity. Integrity means you're habitually honest. You are habitually doing the right thing.
- d. If I were to say to my wife, "Honey, I'll be faithful to you 28 days of the month." Partial faithfulness is unfaithfulness. Partial obedience is disobedience. I can't say I'm a faithful husband most of the time.

- e. No, no. It has to be all the time. It has to become a habit in your life.
6. How do you develop habits? Well, to borrow from Nike, **you just do it.** Over and over. It's about repetition and by practice. In John's Gospel Jesus says this: *"Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you..."* what? *"Practice them!"* If you do them. You practice them.
7. You don't get God's blessing for just knowing the right thing to do. You get God's blessing for doing the right thing. For practicing the right thing and for making it a habit in your life.
- i. Just do it – over and over – just do it. Repetition and practice.
  - ii. Study after study shows it takes six weeks for you to develop a new habit. Six weeks. (40 days – Oh! 40 days of prayer. See why?)
  - iii. You have to do something every day - whether it's exercise, diet, or a spiritual habit or anything else, you've got to do it every day for six weeks before it actually becomes a habit in your life.
  - iv. What we want to do these next six weeks is try to develop some habits in your life that you'll use the rest of your life that will help you grow and be strong.
  - v. During our 40 days of prayer we're going to encourage you to get into the habit of reading scripture and prayerfully reflecting on it. It's developing the habit of a daily time alone with God where you pray a little bit and you talk to God and you read the Bible and let him talk to you.
8. One more thought on how we grow: **We grow when we commit to grow.**
- i. When we choose to grow. When we intend to grow. Growth is a choice. Spiritual growth is not automatic.
  - ii. As I said you can grow older without growing up. Growth is not automatic. It is a choice. You must choose to grow. You must choose to develop the habits. You must choose to make the effort. You make a choice.
  - iii. Now let me ask a very personal question. A year from today how different do you intend to be? Do you intend to be stronger or still stuck in the same problems you are right now? You want to be more mature or you want to still be the way you are right now? It's your choice.

9. To be blunt, the bottom line here is that you're as close to God as you choose to be. It's your choice.
  - i. If you feel far from God, God didn't move. You're as close to God as you want to be. It is a choice and growth is a choice.
  - ii. God says it in the book of Jeremiah (29:13) - *"You'll find me when you get serious about finding me, and want it more than anything else."*

## **Ephesians 4: 11-16**

11 So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, 12 to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. 16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.