

“Don’t Miss the Kickoff”

Ephesians 4:1-10

Sermon Series: Dream Team Week 1. Get Into Shape

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September 7, 2025

One fall, my wife Lisa and I returned to our alma mater, the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, to visit college friends and see a football game. It was a night game – 7 p.m. start. Our plane tickets said we would arrive at 3 p.m. Four hours is plenty of time. When we arrived at the Trenton airport they said the plane was delayed. By the time we landed in Detroit we had two hours to kickoff. We can still make it! When we arrived at the rental car desk to pick up our reserved vehicle they said, “We are out of cars. You can wait two hours or go to our competitors.” We went to the competitors and they said, “We don’t have any cars.” Yet somehow, when I called their headquarters and used my preacher voice, they suddenly found one. Now we had one hour to kickoff. If we hurry we can still make it! We raced down the highway, found a parking place two miles away with only fifteen minutes to kick off. If we run we can make it! Finally, we lined up to get in the stadium minutes before kickoff. “I can’t believe it, we’re going to make it!” Then a gatekeeper said to my wife, “Sorry ma’am you can’t bring your bag. You have to go back and check it.” And that’s how we missed the kickoff.

At least we didn’t miss the kickoff game because of spitting.

Friends: Don’t Miss Your Kickoff! This month everything is kicking off. The school year starts, sports begin, everything starts up at Woodside – Sunday School, Preschool, Adventure Club, Youth Groups, Growth Groups. Maybe you are going to Preschool or Kindergarten, to Junior or Senior High, to college for the first time. Maybe you’re starting your first job or a new job. I celebrated several weddings this summer for couples kicking off their marriage. I’ve spoken with several parents who want to baptize a baby and kick off their walk with Jesus.

Today is your kickoff whether you are a child, youth, adult or senior. God is calling you this day to a fresh start, a new beginning, a new season in your life. The Apostle Paul says,

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Ephesians 4:1

You have a calling. God created you for a purpose. Today is the day to kickoff your calling. Unfortunately, many miss their kickoff. Don’t be like Jalen Carter who missed the Eagles’ Kickoff game because of “The Spit Seen Round the World.” Don’t be like those who live their lives completely unaware of their God designed purpose. We don’t miss our purpose on purpose. We spend our time achieving the goals our culture tells us to do. By the time you reach your 30s, 40s, 50s and 60s, you’ve completed your education, married, had children, and settled into a career. Then, after several years, the questions start to arise. Is this why I’m here? Is this the purpose of my life? Is this all there is? No, you conclude, there must be more than this. So you buy a sports car ... preferably red ... or you change jobs ... or you change relationships.

Many pursue the wrong purpose. They believe their calling and purpose is to live for applause, to live for approval, to live for achievements, to live for possessions, to live for pleasures, to live for positions, to live for power. What’s wrong with this? If you don’t get them, you fall into depression and regret. If you do get them you fall into disappointment because

they're not that great. It's no win either way. But you keep hunting for more. What's the underlying problem? Thinking my purpose is to live for me.

You are Called to Live for God. Your purpose is to live to give God joy! What gives God joy? When you love Him, be with Him, to do things which please Him. Paul says,

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2:4-7

God loves you so much He saved you from death and sin and seated you right next to Him – now and forever. You don't have to wait until you die, your heart is with Him in heaven right now. Since you are saved by grace, your eternal life starts now and goes on forever. You give God joy when you love Him, spend time with Him and do things which please Him.

I love having my grandchildren around. It gives me supreme joy when they want to sit next to me, make cards and gifts for me, spend time with me, go on hikes with me. For Father's Day they gave me a mug with pictures of Lisa and me surrounded by all of them. And the mug says, "Best Pa Ever" They call me Pa – it's short for PASTOR Doug. So I'm sorry if you thought you were the Best Grandpa ever – you're wrong. I have the mug to prove it.

The calling and purpose of your life is live for God, to give God joy, to love God, spend time with God and do things that please your Heavenly Father. Why is this a better purpose than living for earthly goals? Because as good as they are, they don't satisfy and they don't last. Living for God is the only goal that lasts forever and it's the only goal that fully and completely satisfies our hungry hearts.

How do you start living for God? Learn how to **Live with God's People**. Paul continues: Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. Ephesians 4:2-3

Those are such lovely words: humble, gentle, patient, loving, peaceful. This is the perfect prescription for how to raise a family, how to lead a church or business, how to run a community and country. And they are impossible to do!

Case in point. Remember all those wonderful things I just said about having my grandchildren over? Well I had my grandchildren stay over at my house a couple of times this summer. I also went on vacation for a week with them. I learned a very important lesson from them. If you want to have peace and patience in your home: don't have children. Now remember I am the certified "Best PA Ever" – I have the mug to prove it. Please note that I am a veteran parent with decades of experience. But even I was not prepared for the kicking, screaming, and crying at decibels and frequencies I did not know existed. And that was coming from me! If, at any time in your life, you have foolishly let these little humans into your house you know what I am talking about. The Apostle Paul was not a parent but even he knew how hard it is for a family, a church family, a community, a country, a world to get along. This is why he says, please "bear with one another" and "make every effort" to stay together and live in peace with each other.

So how do you learn to live with God's people – your family and church family? Let God mold you into shape. As a potter pushes, pinches and smooths the wet clay on the wheel, so the Lord, the Master Craftsman, shapes each one of us for a purpose. Isaiah prayed,

O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand. Isaiah 64:8

That sounds lovely – except if you are the clay. Pinching, pulling, stretching and squeezing are not pleasant. Getting in shape is never easy. Usually pain comes with the gain. It seems God often molds us into humble, gentle, patient, peaceful people by exposing us to annoying, irritating, demanding, insensitive people. And it takes time.

Why does He do this? He wants us to look like Jesus. These qualities, these fruits of the Spirit, are what we see in Jesus. When God molds you for a purpose the model He uses is Jesus. When Michelangelo was just 24 years old, he created one of the greatest sculptures the world has ever witnessed: the Pieta. When someone asked Michelangelo how he was able to create such beautiful, lifelike sculptures of the Lord, he replied that he simply chipped away from the block of marble anything that did not look like Jesus. To be a follower of Jesus you must let God chip away from you anything that does not look like him. James Moore says,

If you have anything in your life right now that doesn't look like love, then, with the help of God, chip it away! If you have anything in your life that doesn't look like compassion or mercy or empathy, then, with the help of God, chip it away! If you have hatred or prejudice or vengeance or envy in your heart, for God's sake, and the for the other person's sake, and for your sake, get rid of it!¹

Our Model is **JESUS**. God will mold you to match the model. It will take your whole life but it will be worth it. One way to improve your relationships, to learn how to be gentle, patient and peaceful, to learn how to live with people is to start with yourself. Instead of listing or obsessing over what the other person did wrong, ask yourself, "What did I do wrong? What were my unreasonable expectations? What did I do to put myself in a place where I can be hurt? What control do I need to let go?" Whenever you are troubled, for any reason, ask yourself: Why? and What can I do differently? God is shaping and molding us to be like Jesus who said, "Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant...just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Matthew 20:26-28

We are called to live for God, to live with God's people and finally to **Love People God's Way**. What is God's calling for you? To give His gifts to the world. Paul adds,

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he took captivity captive and gave gifts to people." Ephesians 4:7-8

Remember when the Eagles won the Super Bowl? What did they have when they returned to Philly? A huge victory parade. They did the same in Roman times when a general won a great military victory. Yet in those parades, the victorious general took gifts and treasures from the losers and dragged them through the city as captives. I think some Eagles fans wanted to do the same to the Cowboys after Thursday night. But Paul says something remarkable. Jesus is the victorious general who captured captivity. If you capture captivity it can't hold anyone captive.

¹ James W. Moore, Some Things Are Too Good Not To Be True, Nashville: Dimensions, 1994, p. 32.

That means He makes everyone free. What's more: He doesn't take treasure and booty from people. He gives gifts to all people.

What is your calling and purpose? To set people free and give people God's gifts. God has a dream for this world. He longs for hope to remove fear, faith to replace doubt, love to restore lives. He wants to set people free through us. War is not His dream for this world. Hunger and hatred are not His dream for this world. Poverty, pollution and human trafficking are not His dream for this world. Addiction and abuse, doubt, depression and despair are not His dream for this world. His dream is for all people to live in health and wholeness, abundance and peace, contentment and joy, faith, hope and love.

The Lord is drafting you to be on His Dream Team. He has given you gifts to do His work. There is no reason for any of us to sit on the sidelines. Jesus may be calling you to:

- Share the Bible with children in Sunday School or Adventure Club
- Lead a Growth Group
- Greet and welcome people to worship
- Praise Him on the stage or in the tech booth
- Build a Habitat House
- Serve a Meal at the Dinner Ministry, Cast Your Cares or TASK
- Host our Homeless Neighbors with Code Blue
- Build churches, wells and schools on a Mission Trip
- Break the chains of addiction at a Recovery service
- Join us November 2 for the Church Has Left the Building – we'll have mission projects for all ages.

There is something for everyone here. And if we don't have your specific calling, passion and purpose – talk to us and we'll help you get it started. The goal is not points on the board or stats in a book, but people set free! Marriages and families restored. Communities healed. Everybody finding their way home to Jesus. Don't just be a spectator. Join the team. Get in the Game. Make His Dream come True! Don't miss the kickoff!

Several months ago my son-in-law Bryan and daughter Kristin presented me with a book about another victorious military hero: Ulysses Grant. I was surprised to receive it because I already had the book. Then they told me to open it. On the inside cover was a black and white ultrasound photograph of a baby and the words Arriving September 2025.

Yesterday, September 6, Grant Kliefoth was born. He's ready to kickoff his life.

Let's make God's dream come true for Grant and all the children of the world.

Don't miss the kickoff!