

Get Ready – To Grow! Eph 4:11-16

This is a **bike** – if it were my bike, you could tell from the dust that I’ve been on it only once this summer; Anyone else have a bike like that in your garage?
In order to ride this bike, like any bike, you have to get off the couch, pull it out of the garage, and **get on**
But does that mean I’m riding it? (No) How come?
Because I’m not pedaling
Once you get on a bike, you have to pedal in order to ride it
If you stop pedaling, you slow down and eventually stop

That’s like our growth in Christ
Embracing Christ as your Savior is one thing – that’s getting on the bike
Growing in Christ is another – that’s pedaling
Spiritual growth, like pedaling, doesn’t happen by itself – you have to work at it
You have to *press on, strive, run the race, fight the good fight, grow up in every way*
If you don’t, you’ll atrophy, spiritually – i.e. instead of *growing* up, you *shrivel* up
Resulting in a passionless, conviction-less, miserable spiral of life

That’s where some of you are this morning – you need to start pedaling again even though you don’t feel like it
For those of you are pedaling, who are growing in your relationship with Christ and others – want to encourage you to keep on keeping on
Because with the ministry year ahead of us, the opportunities in store, and the glory of God on the line – not a single one of us can afford to stop pedaling and shrivel up
That’s the gist of Paul’s words in Eph 4:11-16 – Grow! Grow! Grow! . . .
Because there’s too much at stake *not* too, and too much to miss if you don’t

Read Eph 4:11-16 – Let me set the context . . .

In previous verses, he just said that while we’re in this thing together as believers, God gives gifts individually for certain purposes; Then he writes in v11 . . .
We all need to grow, and one of the areas we need to focus on is ministry

GET READY TO GROW IN YOUR . . .

Work of Ministry (v12)

Do you realize that as your pastors/staff, we exist to *equip* [you] *the saints, for the work of ministry?* (12)
For the purpose of building up *the body of Christ?* (12)
Our responsibility is not to *do* all the ministry, but to help and encourage *you* to do it
Our work is to help *you do* the work – the work of loving, caring, helping, and serving
It’s like me wearing a tool belt, and instead of showing up at the worksite and building the house myself . . .
I show up, explain the blueprint (Bible), show you what to do (ministry), and then give you all my tools (opp’s) to build the house (church) yourself

You can either show up at the job site and make yourself available for ministry, or not
You can choose to listen and learn, or not
You can choose to *do* the work, or not
Leave any one of those things out, you won’t grow in ministry
In fact, you’ll probably make a mess of it, just like a rookie home builder would a house

Few things more frustrating than to invite someone to join you in the work of ministry, and have them refuse
They look at the road ahead, but refuse to start pedaling
Sometimes that’s due to a fear of failure; Or fear of the work involved; Or time req’d
So they continue to coast/shrivel up, while you ache for the missed opportunities in min.

We have a Ministry Expo coming up in 2 weeks – never done this before
It’s a chance for you to check out all the opportunities here at Harvest, and plug into the work of ministry
Don’t wait to be asked; And don’t just think about it – point your bike in the direction of a ministry, start pedaling, and grow

The second area of growth here is unity; Get read to grow in your . . .

Pursuit of Unity (v13a,16)

One of the purposes of doing the work of ministry and building up the body of Christ is to attain or pursue *the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God* (13a)
In other words, we need to pursue the bond we have with one another due to our common faith in Jesus Christ, and our relationship with him

Growing in unity starts when we are *joined and held together by every joint with which it* [the church] *is equipped* (16)
That is, it starts when we’re connected as one body; when there’s one Spirit we’re led by, a common hope we long for (eternal life); one Lord we submit to, common faith we persevere in, one baptism we identify with, one God we worship (4-6)
Those commonalities are the *joints* that tie us together; That’s where our unity starts

And it grows *when each part is working properly* (16)

Each person is striving toward the same things, at the same time, for the same reasons
That’s when we grow in our pursuit of unity the most
Look at the **Mission** on the back of your bulletin – **read it**
That’s the purpose for our existence
We exist to make God look good by influencing others for Christ, and doing so in spirit of love for God and each other
There’s much unity when we’re all striving for that at the same time
That’s why we encourage everyone to go through Peak Performance – so we can be of the same mind, our bikes pointed in the same direction, pedaling for the same purpose
Can you imagine if we put there “Mission – whatever you want; feel free to bring your baggage and superimpose it on our church; We’ll just pile it on with everybody else’s”
That wouldn’t work too well would it?

Listen, we have a great deal of unity, beautiful thing to be a part of

But we can’t rest on our past success
Our church is changing by the *week*, and Lord willing continue to do so forever
The larger we get, the harder we have to work at being unified as one body with many parts, many people, and many ministries
That’s why SG’s are so important – they provide means to grow in pursuit of unity
A means to knit our hearts together through accountable and caring relationships
They’re not just another church thing to do – they’re a vital part of every person’s walk with Christ, and a vital part of our unity as a church

In the next few weeks, we will be encouraging you to plug into a SG if you're not already
We have about 25 groups available, including 10 new ones just starting . . .

With more leaders in the wings getting ready to go, over the next several months
They start the second week of September and meet 3x's a month at various times during the week
Some are integrated with all ages and stages of life; Others are YA and YM
None of those 25 include the groups associated w/ the Men's, Women's, Student Min's
SG's are biblical and vital

With so many opp's and options, there's no excuse to fail in your pursuit of unity
When the time comes, don't wait, don't procrastinate
Plug in – and get ready to grow in your pursuit of unity

Closely associated with that is a quest for maturity; Get ready to grow in your . . .

Quest for Maturity (v13b,15)

If God's goal for you is to grow up, that should be your goal as well
He loves you just the way you are, but he doesn't want you to stay that way
He wants you to grow up *to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ* (13b)
Immaturity is not an option – *we are to grow up in every way into Christ* (15)
“Baby Christian” should be a temporary title
“Immature in your faith” should not be a phrase long used to describe your walk
Maturity should be your quest

I will never forget an incident as an 8th grader; Remember it vividly
I was hanging around in a park one summer afternoon with my friends, and some girls from my class came by riding in somebody's car
They thought they were big shots for doing so (at least that's what I thought)
So I started antagonizing them, and pestering them as they sat stopped at the curb talking to us
Eventually, I made them so mad, one of them looked at me with all the disgust she could muster and said – “Robby, why don't you just grow up!”
I'm sure I took the high road and responded in a mature way, probably mimicking her – “Robby, why don't you just grow up; Robby, why don't you just grow up!”
Further proving her point
Whatever the case, I don't remember anything after that because I was so *shocked*
It *stung*; It hurt; And the memory of it still does
The reason it hurt so much is that it was *true* –
I was an immature little puke and needed to hear it

You may not be an immature pest like I was, but if you're languishing in *spiritual* immaturity, let me just say it – It's time to *grow up*

There are 4 main ingredients necessary to do so in your quest for maturity –

1. Discipline – to study the Word and pray
There's an old children's song out there that goes like this . . .
Read your Bible pray everyday, pray everyday, pray everyday
Read you Bible pray everyday, and you'll grow, grow, grow
And you'll grow, grow, grow; And you'll grow, grow, grow
Read your Bible pray everyday, and you'll grow, grow, grow
As painful as that was to listen to, it's true is it not?
We make it so complicated when it's so simple!

That's why we offer various Bible studies throughout year, and DG's on Sunday am's
Take advantage of them; Use them to cultivate a discipline to study the word/pray

2. Experience – applying what you know
It's one thing to gain a lot of knowledge through disciplined study
It's another thing to consistently apply it in your life
Head knowledge alone rarely results in maturity
In fact, it usually results in dwelling on stuff that's inconsequential
Maturity grows only as you *apply* the head knowledge in your heart and life
3. Time – it takes time to accumulate the experience necessary to mature
And while you can't rush time, you *can* put yourself into situations where you'll be forced to mature *quicker*
There was a young couple in one of our pre-marital classes several years back who did exactly that
Shortly after they were married, they went to Sudan with SP, built a compound of grass huts in the middle of nowhere, began teaching the local farmers better methods, started a school for the local children, and were kidnapped by rebel militia – all within 8 months of arriving
I'm not advocating that for everyone, but in a very *short* amount of time, they accelerated their maturity by a *lifetime* . . .
Because they put themselves in situations that forced them to mature quicker
You can't rush time, but you can accelerate your experience
4. Community – sharing your life openly with other believers
Life as a spiritual hermit leads to –
Warped thinking; Judgmental spirit (everybody else is always wrong)
Paranoia (you fear what others think); False sense of maturity
If you don't openly share your life with others in the body of Christ – including your fears, your joys, your struggles, your successes . . .
You're setting yourself up for disillusionment – because things won't pan out the way you thought in your little imaginary world
And disappointment – people will never live up to your unrealistic expectations
If that's you – the *only* solution is to open up; Start with a SG and go from there

Community, time, experience, and discipline – many of you are growing by leaps and bounds these days
For others of you, it's time to grow up

Get ready to grow in your . . .

Powers of Discernment (v14)

Your ability to determine good and bad, right from wrong, better and best – discernment
Not talking about some sort of voo-doo power to look into people's souls
Talking about growing in your ability to sense when something is messed up or right on

As you grow in your powers of discernment – you'll no longer be like a child *tossed to and fro by the waves* of life (14a)

Losing your focus at the slightest distraction; Allowing feelings to rule your day
No longer will *every wind of doctrine* appeal to you – especially those associated with empty emotionalism or a low view of Scripture

No longer will *human cunning* fr the smooth talk of devious people, sway your thinking
No longer will *deceitful schemes* touting easy fixes to age-old problems, draw your attention

Recognizing these things for what they are requires a sharp focus on the *right* things, a wariness for the *wrong* things, and a sensitivity to the HS to know the diff
If your powers of discernment are not growing, there's always a danger in obsessing on the wrong things – things that are not good, lovely, pure, commendable

Great example of that these days is the obsession on the demonic realm – we must know about it and beware of it, yes
But never should we obsess on it to the point of elevating it to a place of prominence and recognition that it doesn't deserve; To the point of overshadowing the best things
To the extent you do, you divert your focus from what is good, to what is bad . . .
From what is central, to what is peripheral
You end up pedaling backwards instead of forwards

Don't you wish that wayward doctrines and deceitful schemes came with a label?
Like "Clever Cult – Enter at your own risk"; "Caution – Unbiblical practice ahead"
Unfortunately, it's far more subtle than that – often involves just a sense from the HS that something's awry
David Olson ran into such a thing at a wedding this past weekend in Branson . . .
Where smooth talk, blind allegiance to a person, and isolated communal living all gave him a bad feeling that something wasn't quite right
That's the power of discernment that comes with the presence of the HS, and a focus on all that is good

Get ready to grow in your powers of discernment by focusing on what is good, being wary of what is bad, and trusting the HS for the wisdom to know the diff

Summary

So what's it going to be? Spiritual atrophy or growth
Are you going to pedal this year, all year, or not?
Measure yourself re your ministry, unity, maturity, and discernment
Ask yourself – Where do I want to be this time next year?
Then, set a goal, take advantage of the opp's around here, and get ready to grow –
It's like riding a bike