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GROWING UP ON PURPOSE
Ephesians 4:11-16
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Remember the first time your child brought home a cup of dirt from Sunday School? (Maybe you did this when you were a child.) It doesn't look like much, but in that dirt your child has placed a seed because their class is talking about growing things. You carefully take the cup of dirt and perhaps place it on the window ledge above the kitchen sink so it can get some light. Every day, your child pulls a chair over and looks in the cup. Days go by and there is nothing in the cup, except dirt.

After a while, your child loses interest. You have to remind him or her to keep watering it so the seed will grow.

Then one day you the parent look in the cup and there it is, the first little leaf sticking out announcing to the world, "I'm here!" You call to little Johnny or Suzie, "Come here. Come see what's in the cup." And little Johnny or Suzie drags over a chair, climbs up, and looks. Instantly, their little faces light up. They are so proud of themselves because they have grown something.

You water it some more. Another leaf pops out, then another. Maybe you add fertilizer. You put it in a bigger pot, or outside in a garden. If it is the right kind of seed, maybe it even grows to produce a squash or a cucumber or a carrot, or maybe it produces flowers. How exciting it is to grow things!

We know how to grow things, don't we? We even know how to grow children. We go out of our way to help our children grow up. We provide Nutrition, Social skills, Knowledge, Talent development. We fertilize them with love. Now we could just ignore them and let them grow up on their own. But we don't do that any more than we do that to a seed in a cup of dirt, because we want them to grow up in a certain way to be healthy and mature.

Growing them up is hard to do. It takes time. It takes trial and error. It takes patience. It takes discipline. But we do it because we want them to grow up. From dependence to independence. From immature reasoning to mature reasoning. From self-centeredness to other directed. From ignorance to knowledge. What we tolerate in children we do not expect to see in them when they become adults.

This morning, we are talking about growing up on purpose. And the kind of growing up we are talking about is what Paul means in the fourth chapter of Ephesians. Paul talks about another kind of growing up we need to do. It is the kind of growing up we are talking about in our mission statement. *Our mission is to make and grow disciples of Jesus Christ who*

give their lives to make a difference in the world. Our purpose as a church is to help each other grow up in our relationship with God and as followers of Jesus. Growth is one of the three legs in our three-legged Ancient Modern Discipleship stool. You need all three legs – worship, growth, and service – in order to enjoy your relationship with God and to realize your potential as a child of God.

Here is one thing I want us to get out of this passage. **Growth is so important that God provides leaders whose job it is to help us grow up.** According to Ephesians 4, verses 11-13, my job is to help you grow up. This assumes that I am also growing up into Christ. One of the frightening things I have learned over the years is that a church will seldom grow beyond the maturity level of its leaders. If the leaders stop growing, the church will stop growing. One of the keys to an effective church is leaders who are personally committed to growing up into Christ.

In verses 12-14, Paul gives us three reasons we need to grow up: so we can perform good service to the world, so we can build up the body of Christ, the church, and so we can stand strong against every false wind of doctrine and belief that blows our way.

This goes for all ages. This goes for children, youth, and adults. It is why we have Discipleship Teams in our church for each age group and why we have leaders who give their time to work with children and youth. It is why we encourage parents to get their children and youth into our discipleship ministries. We want all our children and youth to grow up into Christ to experience his grace and learn from him and realize their potential in him. After all he is the Lord of lords, and King of kings. He is our rock and our salvation. He is the way, the truth, and the life. Why wouldn't we want our children and youth to grow up into him whose way is the way of life? I encourage you parents to pick up the brochure titled "Children's Ministry" in the hallway to see what our thinking is.

Another thing I want us to see is that **we never stop needing to grow in our relationship with God and as disciples of Jesus.**

Maybe you remember hearing these words before: *When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; but when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways.* Paul wrote these words in what we often call the love chapter, I Corinthians 13. It is verse 11. Okay, it sounds like he has finally arrived, he has grown up. Right? He knows it all. Not so fast! He goes on to write in verse 12, *For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.*

The bottom line is that none of us ever reach full maturity in this life. There is always more to know, more to become, more to do. Every one of us has so much more potential that can be unleashed by growing up into Christ.

Let me speak to the men here. A national survey of men who have been church members all their lives shows that for the majority of men, there is no significant spiritual growth between the ages of 20 and 60. Men by and large are spiritual flat-liners. In the emergency room of a hospital, they would be considered dead. What saddens me about this is the lost potential. What alarms me is that whatever our churches have been doing, it has not produced maturing disciples.

This is one of the reasons we are developing and growing our small group ministry in our church. It is why my personal goal is to see 100% of our adults in a small group. We are calling them Growth Groups.

Let me help you determine if you need to be in a Growth Group.

1. Name three Fruits of the Spirit listed in the Bible and tell how these are present in your life. N
2. Which one of our Core Values are you strongest in? Which one are you working to strengthen? (You can find these posted in the restrooms if you have forgotten what they are.) W
3. What are your top two spiritual gifts and how are you using them to God's glory? W
4. Here in the Bible are the words: *In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. . . . Nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.* W
5. When was the last time you shared your faith with someone else? W

If you had trouble with any of these, you may need what the doctor prescribes, a good, healthy Growth Group because (and here is my last insight from Ephesians 4) **it takes a village to grow a mature disciple.** You can't do it on your own. You have to grow up on purpose and you can do that only in the right environment.

God plants the seed of faith in you. But that seed gets planted in ground so hard it has no chance of growing. The soil is packed so tightly no air or nutrients can get to it and it just languishes. It may sit there for 60, 70, 80 years with nothing happening. You can't loosen up that soil on your own no matter how hard you try. You need others to start breaking up that hard soil so they can water it and add nutrients. They help you see the black spots that form on the leaves. They notice when the plant is turning yellow. They add the fertilizer. They prune. They love you and watch in awe as God

brings fruit from your life, as you change before their eyes and miracles start happening around you.

I want to introduce to you someone whose life has radically altered because of her courage to join a small group in our church. Sunshine H. is going to share with you her story. (The following is a testimony given by a member of SBPC.)

I wanted to share with you a miracle that has occurred in my life since I joined SBPC. I really never thought of it as a miracle until I was telling the Women's Bible Study small group what changes regarding my family had occurred in my life as a direct result of my participation in this small group. When I finished telling them, Marnie B. said... "that is nothing short of a miracle in my eyes!"

Let's start somewhat at the beginning and suffice to say my childhood was not ideal. I do not want to dwell on the details because to do so would take the focus off the results of the miracle. I always thought of myself as a Christian...grew up in the Catholic church...went to church every Sunday until I left home. I did not get back into regular church services until about 15 years ago. Still all I did was go to church on Sundays (I think Pastor Mike might have referred to me as a "drugstore" Christian) but I did not actually start participating on any level until I met my "precious" Ric. As Ric said in his testimony a while back, we joined this church after trying to become members of another Presbyterian church. The first year or so I did not get involved in the church happenings very much and consequently did not feel much a part of the church. I went to the Wednesday morning Women's Bible study small group for a while but did not feel my knowledge of the Bible was adequate so I quit going. Still I wanted to be part of this church family so I tried the women's Bible study group again about a year later and the study changed my life forever. They were just beginning a new study by Beth Moore, **Breaking Free**. The study was so intense I almost quit again because I was so insecure about not knowing much about the Bible but somewhat out of desperation I decided to continue the study. It was a very emotional and painful study for me...but caring loving women in this small group like , Nancy M., Teresa B., Cathy H., Donna W., and Donna D. supported me each Wednesday as the months passed by. They prayed for me and with me each week even though I still did not quite "get it".. You see, the hole in my heart was slowly healing thru God's love for me and the love of all of these women. I had had many many years of therapy to deal with my childhood and although I understood everything in my head it had not reached my heart yet ...hence the hole in my heart was still there.

I guess I better get to the Miracle! I have not had a lot of contact with my older brother since I left home (maybe saw him 4 times in 25 years...at weddings, funerals). The relationship with my Mother was more obligatory than loving. I did

what any daughter was "suppose" to do for their mother but only because I knew it was the right thing to do...not because I wanted to. I was very angry at both of them most of my life...but I knew something was changing within me. I was starting to forgive them...although I did not recognize it at the time...looking back now I know that is what was happening. God was starting to fill the hole in my heart with love and forgiveness. About 3 years ago Ric and I decided to host Thanksgiving in our home for my family...I actually invited my older brother to stay in my home...my whole family stayed there...the first time in over 15 years my 3 siblings, my Mother and their families had all been together...it was the beginning of a healing process for me. I prayed and members of my small group prayed for me constantly during those 4 days together and God answered all of my prayers...I actually felt his fatherly arms around me at times. My family not only spends Thanksgiving together each year now but also gets together several other times during the year. My mother and I now have a very loving relationship. ...now that is a miracle...one in which I would have never realized without my participation in this small group. The miracle does not end there for me though as I learned the power of prayer for me personally...I felt called to lead one of the growth groups and actually volunteered to do so...I joined the Prayer Shawl Ministry and have had the wonderful pleasure of bonding with women like Jeanne P., Jeanne P., Beth C., Nancy M., Gail B., Stephanie F., and Lisa D. ...Ric and I participated in Brian and Lisa's Core group and bonded with wonderful people like the Woffards, the Millers, the Corbins, and the Shastids. We not only studied God's word together, we had wonderful fellowship together. I learned that most of us feel inadequate about our knowledge of the Bible...but I no longer let that hold me back from learning from God's word. I encourage each of you to join one of the upcoming small groups and I promise if you participate...miracles small or large will happen in your life too!