

**Grow! Together.**  
*Ephesians 4:11-16*

Today we are starting a 3-week series called Together examining the roll of community should play in the local church and specifically how community groups help to foster this.

**Introduction: Forget the church, follow Jesus**

A few weeks ago Newsweek Magazine ran a cover story with this title” Forget the church, follow Jesus. The point of the article was to show how Christianity has been destroyed by politics, priests, and get-rich evangelists. Is he right about some of this? Absolutely. The church has failed and erred in many ways. But, can we just follow Jesus and forget the church? We are going to spend the next three weeks showing why the church is essential for anyone who wants to be a follower of Jesus.

The title of the sermon today is: Grow! Together. What this is not? Our focus is not numerical growth but spiritual growth. Growing together as followers of Jesus Christ.

**Context:**

Paul’s primary focus is to preserve unity in the body (1-3). In 4-6 he discusses the elements of unity that serve as a model of Christian unity. In 7-16 he analyzes the means to preserving this unity, the giving and exercising of spiritual gifts.

**Read Ephesians 4:11-16**

- 4:13-14: The ultimate goal is maturity in Christ (so they won’t be led astray)
  - We need to think corporately, not individually. As the individual grows and contributes to the body, the body as a whole can grow.
- 4:15-16: This happens as the “body” speaks the truth in love and exercises their gifts to one another.
- 4:11-12: The body needs to be equipped to do this (function of pastors, teachers, etc.).

**The point: You should commit to a body where you can grow and help others grow to maturity in Christ.**

**I. Grow together by growing in Christ (Commit to Christ).**

- a. The main point: growth will not happen if the body is not connected to Christ. He is the source, the means for growth and he is also the goal that all growth is moving towards.
- b. Jesus is the source of the gifts (4:7-11).**
  - i. The text makes it clear that it is not the believer that produces growth but their utilization of the gifts that Christ has given them.
  - ii. He gives gifts and he is the head

**c. Jesus is the source of the body's unification – the Head (4:15b-16).**

- i. Head implies preeminence, authority, and source.
- ii. He is the provider.

"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

**d. Jesus is the goal (4:13).**

- i. Believers are to grow to Christ who is our standard. He is the model for the believer. "all" – all believers are to attain maturity, not just some.
- ii. To the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God.
  1. A dynamic faith brings a dynamic knowledge of Christ which in turn produces more faith.

*"Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish" (Philippians 3:8).*

- iii. To a mature person, namely fullness in Christ.
  1. This is in contrast to the immature children mentioned in the next verse. What does immaturity look like?
  2. Children are gullible, lack understanding and perception. They are easily influenced by others.
  3. The picture here is of confusion, turmoil, and disunity.
  4. Immature believers could easily fall prey to false doctrines because they lack a proper understanding of God and his Word.
  5. The "mature person" refers to the church, the corporate body of believers" (Hoehner, 555). As the body matures, unity results. In fact, a sign of immaturity is the disunity of the body.
  6. How does an infant in Christ grow to maturity?
    - a. Physical growth: Early on it is milk (formula), a big day is when they can start eating solids (jars of baby food: green beans, squash, apple sauce), then they start eating table food (broken into small pieces). A child isn't going to grow physically until they can eventually eat substantial food.
    - b. Mental growth: They start by learning how to say small words (daddy, mommy), soon they'll be putting small phrases together, then sentences, and then eventually they'll start learning their ABC's.
    - c. Spiritual growth: the role of the word

“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).

**Ills:** What happens if we don't grow up? We joke with one another on birthdays saying, “You still look like you're 21.” This is a compliment, right? How would you feel if I said, “You still look like you're 2.” This is not a compliment. Let it not be said of RHC that we are 21 years old but still look/act like a 2 year old.

- e. Jesus is the source and the goal because he is worthy of all the glory.

## **II. Grow together by committing to redemptive relationships (Commit to Others).**

- a. Can you grow in Jesus and not commit yourself to others?
  - i. The Bible never separates your individual devotion to Christ and the church.
  - ii. Reflections from the text:
    - 1. You can't be equipped if you don't allow others to equip you (4:12).
      - a. “It is important to be endowed with the gift(s) of the Spirit but it is also important to learn to use the gift(s) effectively in the church for its edification” (Hoehner, 550).
    - 2. You won't grow apart from others speaking the truth to you (4:15).
    - 3. You won't grow if you aren't connected to the body (4:16).
      - a. “When applied to the body of believers it is clear that the union and growth of the body can only come when there is contact with other members of the body...Every believer is necessary to this process, not just a select few” (Hoehner, 573).

“It is both foolish and wicked to suppose that we will make much progress in sanctification if we isolate ourselves from the visible church. Indeed, it is common place to hear people declare that they don't need to unite with a church to be a Christian. They claim that their devotion is personal and private, not institutional or corporate. This is not the testimony of the great saints of history; it is the confession of fools” (R. C. Sproul, *The Soul's Quest for God*, 151).

- b. Why do we isolate ourselves from community?
  - i. We are all sinners and because of that we are all selfish. We don't want anyone telling us how to live.
  - ii. Also, many of us still love our sin and sin thrives in the darkness, in isolation where no one can see it. But, community brings it to the light.

iii. "At one level we want friendships. At another level we don't want them!...We have a love-hate relationship with relationships!" (Lane and Tripp, HPC, 75).

c. The role of community groups at RHC

- i. You can't foster this kind of growth just on Sunday morning
- ii. Community groups: don't focus on a group that meets one night of the week but a web of relationships that exist 24/7

How does your life currently allow you to develop relationships that are deep enough to help you grow and change? What are some obstacles that hinder redemptive relationships from developing in your life? (From Tripp)

- The busyness of life, keeping relationships distant and casual.
- A total immersion in friendships that are activity- and happiness- based.
- A conscious avoidance of close relationships as too scary or messy?
- A formal commitment to church activities, with no real connection to people.
- One-way, ministry-driven friendships in which you always minister to other, but never allow others to minister to you.
- Self-centered, "meet my felt needs" relationships that keep you always receiving, but seldom giving.
- A private, independent, "just me and God" approach to the Christian life.
- Theology as a replacement for relationship. Knowing God as a life of study, rather than the pursuit of God and his people.

What needs to change so that you can form more meaningful relationships with the people who are already in your life?

### III. **Grow together by speaking the truth in love (Serve Others).**

a. **Ministry should be done by all: Combat clergy vs. laity (4:11-12).**

- i. Apostles: The context here is the gift, not an office. The gift of apostleship was to establish churches in areas that have not been reached by others (Rom. 15:20).
- ii. Prophets: in the present context, the NT prophet most likely corresponds to the OT prophet when revelation and authority are concerned. The focus of prophets was the communication of divine revelation. "In light of an incomplete canon, the prophets may well have received revelation to complete what was needed so that every person could be presented perfect before God" (Hoehner, 400).
- iii. Evangelists: this is only mentioned two other places (Acts 21:8; 2 Tim. 4:5). The evangelists would win converts to the faith
- iv. Shepherd: The best translation is pastor, one who cares for his flock as a shepherd cares for his sheep.

- v. Teacher: a teacher instructs not only in factual matters and skills but also in moral evaluation. Likewise, teaching in the local assembly should have authority when based on the Scriptures
- vi. Pastors can't do everything and they're not supposed to do everything.
- vii. Their purpose is to prepare believers for the work of the ministry. Every believer is to do the work of the ministry.
- viii. "The goal of Christian ministry is quite simple, and in a sense measureable: are we making and nurturing genuine disciples of Christ?" (Marshall and Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine*, 14).

"Most of the time, we are oblivious to this. We are too easily captivated by our self-centered little worlds. But Ephesians 4 propels us beyond a life consumed by personal happiness and achievement. Your life is much bigger than a good job, an understanding spouse, and non-delinquent kids. It is bigger than beautiful gardens, nice vacations, and fashionable clothes...God is rescuing fallen humanity, transporting them into his kingdom, and progressively shaping them into his likeness—and he wants you to be a part of it" (Tripp, *Instruments*, 20).

**b. Ministry should be a ministry of the Word (4:15).**

- i. "...the basic methodology of body growth is that all the members 'speak the truth in love', one to another" (Marshall and Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine*, 45).
- ii. "God transforms people's lives as people bring his Word to others" (Tripp, *Instruments*, 19).
- iii. This picture of biblical personal ministry is very simplistic. It is basically a call to biblical friendship. Love people. Know them. Speak truth in their lives. Help them do what God has called them to do.
- iv. How might you speak the truth in love in each of your relational networks? (in the home? In your work? At church? Neighbors?)

**c. Ministry should be done in love (4:15).**

- i. "The combination of powerful truth wrapped in self-sacrificing love is what God uses to transform his people" (Tripp, *Instruments*, 21).
- ii. "Reproof is unavoidable. God's Word demands it when a brother falls into open sin... Nothing can be more cruel than the tenderness that consigns another to his sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe rebuke that calls a brother back from the path of sin" (Bonhoeffer, 107).
- iii. "Confrontation can be very difficult, and many avoid it. But what wasted time could be redeemed in our lives if faithful friends started telling us some truths about ourselves" (Terry Virgo, *Restoration in the Church*, 72).

## **Conclusion:**

If you came up to me today and said, “Look, I’d like to get more involved here and make a contribution, but I just feel like there’s nothing for me to do. What can I do?” How should I respond? Should I start thinking of some event or program that you could help with? Jobs or roles? Usher, community group leader, children’s worker, treasurer, musician, etc. The implication for this way of thinking is clear: if all the jobs and roles are taken, then there’s nothing for you to do. You are reduced to being a passenger.

“However, if the real work of God is people work—the prayerfully speaking of his word by one person to another—then the jobs are never all taken. The opportunities for Christians to minister personally to others are limitless” (Marshall and Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine*, 27).

Let’s not limit the work of the ministry to playing in the band, running the sound or PowerPoint, serving on the first impressions team. Those things are needed and great but the work of the ministry is “speaking the truth in love.” It has at its goal the edification and maturation of a follower of Christ.