

August 6, 2017  
National Presbyterian Church  
**Ephesians: Always Growing Up?**  
Ephesians 4:15-24  
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Through the months of July and August we're looking together at Paul's letter to the Ephesians one of the powerful letters of the Apostle Paul written to the first Christians, within 25-35 years or so after Jesus' life, death and resurrection. And we come this morning to our passage in Ephesians Ch. 4.

Let me set the scene by reading a passage by Mark Roberts, in his book, The Story of God Bible Commentary: Ephesians, p.69

For sixteen years I was the pastor of a church in suburban Southern California. Most of my members appeared to have made it. They lived in elegant homes, drove the latest cars, raised highly successful children, and participated regularly in church. Some of these people were truly happy. But over the years many shared their angst with me.

- They had allowed their drive to squeeze the joy out of their lives.
- They kept striving, however, because that's what they were wired to do.
- Though many were highly paid, they did not value their work but felt trapped in their careers because of how much money it took to pay for their homes and cars and to fund the appetites and activities of their children.

Some even felt trapped financially because of their support of the church.

Many of the people I served fell into addictions that damaged their families, friendships, and professional lives. Others let their fleshly desires lead to momentary euphoria but long-term despair. Those I have just described *felt dead inside*.

I do not know whether you feel dead or alive today – but what the apostle Paul says in Ephesians 2 is that *all of us* are dead: spiritually dead, cut off from God because of the choices we have repeatedly made!

God is like the air we breathe: Close your mouth and hold your nose – and before long, without air, physically you die! And if we turn our backs on God – close our hearts and minds to God, think we can live without God even for a moment – then, in the same way, spiritually, we'll die too!

Some of us may feel or look more alive than others but all of us are in the same boat, says Ephesians 2: we've all rebelled against God, so we're spiritually dead which means that by ourselves we cannot bring ourselves back to life again – without help.

So the news is pretty bad and would be fatal except for the fact that there's also some good news to tell, more powerful than the bad news:

In Ephesians 1 and 2 Paul tells us that The God against whom we've rebelled, instead of letting us remain dead forever, has chosen to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

In the form of his Son, Jesus Christ, he enters the world, and allows himself to be put to death and then, three days later, rises to life again.

And in this death, the Bible says, Jesus pays for our sins, every nickel and dime.

And in his resurrection He stretches out his hands to us as if to say, “If you hold on to me by faith, If you allow yourself to believe just how much I love you, If you let me enter the center of your life by faith; I’ll give you my resurrection power – my power not only over physical death, but over spiritual death – and just as important, my power over ‘dead-end living.’ I’ll transform your lives forever.”

And that’s what Dr. Andrew Purves helped us think about last week, as we looked at Paul’s prayer for all Christians in Ephesians 3:18-21, in which he prays that we would have a deep and visceral knowledge of God (like falling in love) in which we know with powerful assurance, first, that God loves us and, second that Christ lives in us: a profound knowledge that contains within it the power to change us, to help us keep on growing spiritually the rest of our lives

If I can think of anybody who might claim the right to give up on life and to stop growing to become stagnant (emotionally, physically and spiritually) it would be those who’ve lost a limb, or multiple limbs, through accident or illness or war.

I cannot begin to imagine what that would be like. But over the past ten years or so we keep hearing stories of those who choose not to exercise this dead-end option to “stop growing,” but decide instead to “return to life” in the most amazing ways – spiritually and physically, climbing mountains, running races, and shaking hands!

Now, there’s no question that part of the reason for the proliferation of these stories has to do with the development of computerized hands and feet (prosthetic limbs) that have rapidly become powerful and sophisticated. And they are a huge part of the story: a source of power attached to the body that enables “the miraculous” to take place. But what’s just as important to remember is that it’s not just these sophisticated prosthetic limbs by themselves that create the change: it’s a mix of things.

The powerful device is one of those things, to be sure. But then, there’s the presence and love of family and friends, physicians and therapists on our side and by our side. And more than that, months of determination and perseverance in the daily training of the brain and muscles to activate the new powerful addition to the body. And when the mix is there, that’s when the miracle happens. The dead comes to life again and all kinds of new possibilities for the future open up.

And this is how the Bible conceives the Christian life.

As a gift of grace, given freely, Jesus Christ not only forgives us, and opens the door to heaven and eternal life. And as a Gift, he loves us eternally, and promises to live within us, empowering us to grow and change until his life becomes our life and we become like him. But this change is not automatic. Just as with a new prosthetic limb, we are the ones who have to develop the new habits that open the door to the new power attached to us so Christ can begin his work. We have a part to play. We need to commit ourselves to a daily regimen, not just of “physical” therapy, but of “spiritual” therapy! And this is more a matter of routine and habit than magic.

Which brings us to our passage in Ephesians 4 that addresses OUR side of the equation; OUR responsibility to do the mundane things that lead to change and that suggest to us at least three habits that can unleash Christ’s power and love within us to help us grow

1. Beginning at the end of our passage, habit one is this: to make a Moral Prayer List to share with God every day. A simple list of the various areas of your life that need work to grow. This is, in effect, what Paul gives to us at the end of our passage in Eph. 4 and 5: a list of different areas of our lives that need our attention

- a) <sup>25</sup>So then, put away falsehood (TRUTH)
- b) <sup>26</sup>There's a time to be angry (EMOTION)
- c) <sup>28</sup>Don't be "thieves," taking what's not yours (THINGS)
- d) <sup>29</sup>Don't use your mouths for evil talk (WORDS)
- e) <sup>31</sup>Put away from you all bitterness and wrath (RESENTMENTS)
- f) <sup>3</sup>And as for fornication and impurity of any kind (SEX)

So, this list is about *truth and emotion and things and words and resentments and sex*. Those are powerful arenas of life to focus on, to start with, to bring before Christ, every day in prayer, asking him to change us and to help us grow.

And -- of all these, Paul's greatest emphasis in our passage is on our words:

- <sup>5:4</sup> Obscene talk, coarse silliness, vulgarity is completely out of place
- <sup>4:29</sup> Don't use your mouths for evil talk, but only for what is useful for building up
- <sup>4:25</sup> Putting away falsehood, speak the truth to your neighbors, for we are members of one another; and then
- <sup>4:15</sup> Speak the truth in love

In other words, beginning with your words (content and tone) day by day make a prayer list of the areas of your life that need to change

2. And then in the second place, Paul advises us to Get Dressed every day! Get dressed! Deliberately, specifically: *clothe yourselves with Christ*.

Let me read 4:22-24

What you learned about Christ was this:

- <sup>22</sup> to put away your former way of life, your "old self," corrupt and deluded by dead-end desires;
- <sup>23</sup> and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,
- <sup>24</sup> by clothing yourselves with the "new self," (the Jesus self) created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Every morning we get dressed – don't we? We decide what we are going to look like when we go out in public. We decide

- what to take off or put on
- what to keep or throw away
- what makes us feel good

And we spend a lot of money doing it – even when we want to look casual! The jeans industry in the U.S. is worth \$13 billion each year, with some jeans costing between \$300-600, just so – we can look casual but, well, not sloppy!

<https://maloney.house.gov/sites/maloney.house.gov/files/documents/The%20Economic%20Impact%20of%20the%20Fashion%20Industry%20--%20JEC%20report%20FINAL.pdf>

It's a big deal: dressing up the right way. The right clothes for the right occasion. And we all do it: every single day! And Paul says that if we are to grow up spiritually, we need to think the same way. We need to say deliberately to ourselves and to God "*Today, I'm going to dress up in*

*the clothes of Christ! Lord, help me put on the character of Christ.” And what is that character? Nothing other than the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23 – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. “Lord, help me dress up in the clothes that really matter!”*

So, (1) Every day deliberately Make a Moral List

And (2) Every day deliberately Get Dressed up with the character of Jesus.

And then, third (3): Surround Yourself with Help! With people who can help.

In Ephesians 4:15-16, Paul says,

<sup>15</sup>Speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way, into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup>from whom the whole church, like a body joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, receives the power to grow, building itself up in love.

The Amputee Coalition website says this:

- It is common to spend about six months to a year working with a rehabilitation team on a new prosthetic device.
- The first year is tough. A lot of work will be needed to recondition muscles. Your body will need to relearn activities, gait, balance and coordination. But improvement will come with time and effort.
- (and then it concludes with this)
- *It is important to have a strong support network around you for this journey. A support group in your area or a certified peer visitor can offer you both encouragement and information from their perspective.*

<http://www.amputee-coalition.org/resources/prosthetic-faqs-for-the-new-amputee/>

Simple advice: very few people if any can change their lives by themselves alone, but only with the love and presence of others – who comfort us, but also hold us to account!

SO If you don't know of anyone who will do that for you, then for God's sake, when the Fall comes sign up for a small fellowship group, or a Sunday School Class, where Christian friendship can begin, and be nurtured and we can help each other GROW!

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Christ's passion for you and me is clear

- He never wants to leave us with dead-end lives
- He died to take away our sins so we could live with God forever
- And He rose to life, so that he could live inside us and give us his resurrection power an internal power to enable us to do what we could never do by ourselves.

But, at the same time He has no intention of robbing us of our part – our responsibility.

You got a new leg or arm? A miracle can now take place. But not without dedication and work to incorporate the new power into our life

- Christ's forgiveness as a gift? Yes!
- Christ loving you as a gift? Yes!
- Christ within you as a gift? Yes!

So now the work begins: to make Christ's character our own.

Every Day, practice spiritual therapy, which is our responsibility

And here's a place to begin:

1. Every Day: Make a Moral Prayer List – areas for Growth (take Eph. 4 home with you).  
Begin with your words
2. Every Day: Get Dressed Spiritually – choose to put on Christ. Maybe at the same time as you're getting dressed.
3. Whenever possible
  - Surround yourself with the Right Help
  - Make Christian friends in the church
  - Connect with others to help you stay the course and Grow.

Who wants to spend their lives just withering away? Surely not you! No – says Paul – We have been called and given the gifts to enable us to “grow up into Christ in every way” (Ephesians 4:15).

He's done his part. We must do ours.

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