

**The Message for May 13, 2012**

**Ephesians 4:7, 11-16**

*Grow*

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A survey was done recently by a group in search for the perfect pastor. Many people willingly responded and here are the results. According to this study the perfect pastor:

- Preaches a sermon in exactly 12 minutes.
- Often condemns sin, but never upsets anyone.
- Works from 8:00 in the morning until 10:00 at night
- Serves as the church janitor and grounds keeper.
- Makes \$100 a week, wears nice clothes, buys good books, drives a nice car, and gives \$50 a week to the church.
- Is 28-years-old, and has been preaching for 30 years
- Is wonderfully gentle and handsome.
- Gives of himself completely, but never gets too close to anyone lest he be criticized for playing favorites.
- Speaks boldly on social issues, but never becomes politically involved.
- Has a burning desire to work with teenagers, and spends all his time with senior citizens.
- Makes 15 house calls daily to church members, visits the shut-ins and those in the hospital, spends all of his time evangelizing the unchurched, and is always in his office when needed.

Folks, I have to tell you something, if you were looking for the perfect pastor, you got robbed! No... You got me. You got -- Rob!

It's probably safe to say, there never was and will never be a perfect pastor in this world. Try as we might to find one, or be one, or produce one. That's a relief. And yet, we worship a perfect God. A God who has called me, qualifies me, and continues to grow me into the pastor God wants me to be in this place at this time. Thank God for that. And thank you for your patience and prayers in helping me to grow as a pastor.

Truth is there is no perfect pastor and there is no perfect church either. Try as we might to find one, or be one, or produce one. That's a relief. And yet, we worship a perfect God who continues to call you, continues to qualify you, and continues to grow you into the church God is calling us to be in this place at this time. Thank God for that. And thank God for bringing you here this morning. I hope in some way your life is transformed here today – that you are equipped in some way to live the faith this week. AND I hope you will come back next week and bring someone with you.

Our topic today is *grow*.

According to our reading this morning from Ephesians the pastor's job is not to do the ministry but to equip others for ministry – to grow people into being disciples of Jesus. That's the job of all church leaders – to equip the members for ministry. This is the only place in the Bible where the word *pastor* appears. AND it's listed with four other key leadership positions in the church. Listen to these words again...

*“The gifts [God] gave [to the church] were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors, and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.”*

According to this Bible verse leaders in the church are...

1. to equip the members,
2. to do the ministry,
3. to build up the church,
4. to empower people to grow in unity of the faith,
5. to become more like Jesus.

You may have heard me say in the past, “Go be Jesus... to others.” I said that in our last series. BUT... we can't be Jesus to others. Besides that Jesus doesn't want us to go and be him. We are to go and be ourselves and realize that Jesus goes with us.

The word *maturity* in this verse means, “to grow in becoming more and more like Jesus everyday.” And the only way for that to happen is to spend time with Jesus. This is the only place in the Bible where the word *maturity* appears. Not sure why the word *pastor* and *maturity* appear here together but...

This is important stuff because if we get this wrong, we won't get anything right. Leaders in the church are to be equippers and each person is responsible for their own faith maturity. This is not an easy shift to make. It's hard to go from doing to helping others do.

Somewhere we've done a flip-flop in the church. We need to flip it back. We've created something that was never meant to be. We've created an environment where we pay the pastor (and other leaders) to do the ministry on behalf of the people. But that's not the way it's supposed to be. Did you know that liturgy means the work of the people? That tells me something.

According to the Bible *leadership in the church is measured less by what leaders accomplish and more by what leaders cause to happen in the lives of other people. Let me repeat that... Leadership in the church is measured less by what leaders accomplish and more by what leaders cause to happen in the lives of other people.*

Everything we do in the church ought to focus on developing a culture that equips people. It's a perfect model. This is important stuff because if we get this wrong, we won't get anything right.

Unfortunately, it's not the model we use. And it's not the model I was taught in seminary either. I was taught to be a doer not an equipper. I discovered this model in my first parish when I was trying to do it all and then one day I read this verse. I wonder why don't we use this biblical model? More importantly, how we can recapture this perfect biblical model for leadership in the church.

Now I could be wrong on this but it seems to me that we have developed a codependency model, a less than perfect model in the church. I looked up the word *codependency* on Wikipedia, so you know it's got to be legitimate...

Wikipedia says, *Codependency is unhealthy love and a tendency to behave in overly passive or excessively caretaking ways that harm one's relationships and quality of life. It also often involves placing a lower priority on one's own needs, while being excessively preoccupied with the needs of others. Codependency can occur in any type of relationship, including family, work, friendship, and also romantic, peer or community relationships.*

We don't need codependent leaders in the church. We need more than a few people who do it all. We need pastors and leaders who help others do it all. I am so thankful for the many doers in this church who serve and yet we never see them at what they do. The people who prepare communion, or fill the candles, or lead our children's ministry, or participate in our small groups' ministry. If we considered all the people who serve in this church, it would make our heads spin. Thank you all for serving.

What we need are coaches in the church. That's what we need. A coach is a great metaphor for the role of leaders in the church. It's very biblical.

I really enjoy being an assistant coach for both of my children's baseball teams. Working with 6,7,8,9, and 10-years-olds is challenging and rewarding all at the same time. You never know what they are going to say or do next. What amazes me is how much they grow from game to game and from week to week.

The biggest challenge in coaching this level is helping them stay focused, especially at the T-Ball level. Here is what some of the players have said to me while on the field. In T-Ball the coaches are out on the field with them.

*Hey coach, my dad is taking me out for ice cream after the game.*

*Hey coach, is this the last batter?*

*What inning is this, I'm hot...*

*Can I go to the bathroom? (and they usually run off the field for this one)*

*I'm thirsty are we done yet?(and they walk off the field for this one)*

*Hey! My mom is at the concession stand, I wonder what she's getting.*

Helping the players stay focused is a big part of coaching. When we started a month or so ago we had to teach them the basics. Some of them couldn't even hold a glove or a bat or throw the ball. So we had to teach them:

- How to hold and throw the ball
- How to stand and swing the bat
- How to field and catch the ball
- How to watch the ball hit the bat
- How to not watch the ball and run to first base

The thing about coaching is this – I can't play the game for them. I can't throw the ball for them or hit the ball for them or run for them or field for them. They have to do it for themselves. As a coach you are no longer playing the game but helping others play the game. A good coach teaches the basics and then reminds the players of the basics again and again and again. Good coaches always go back to the basics.

I really enjoyed doing basis drills with my son Simon in our yard at the house – doing grounders and pop-ups. Like many of the boys on his team he is growing into a fine young ball player. And it's fun to help them grow. He, like all the boys on the team, wants to be in the game. They don't like sitting on the bench. And they tell me so. They say – “Coach I don't want to sit on the bench, there's no action in here.” They want to be in the game.

Pastoring is like coaching – 1) I need to remind people to stay focused on Jesus and 2) I can't live the faith for you. That would be codependency. You have to do it yourself. A pastor teaches the basics and then regularly reminds people to practice those basics again and again and again.

What are the basics for us in the church? What are the drills we need to practice regularly. Here are six of them:

1. Pray daily – spend time talking with and listening to God everyday.
2. Worship weekly – God created us for community and together we grow as a team.
3. Read the Bible Regularly – God's word is the playbook for life.
4. Serve at and beyond Friedens – we are all gifted to serve and there is a place for everyone on the church team.
5. Relate and encourage one another in our spiritual growth – every one of us here today is able to be a pastor to someone – to support one another.
6. Give of your self using 10% as the guide – God has graciously given to us and by giving we reflect the love of God in our lives.

By practicing these basics of the faith we grow, we get better, we improve, and we build up the body of Christ.

Growth doesn't come automatically. We have to practice. On the ball field it's easy to tell which players practice between the games and which ones don't. Those who practice grow, get better, and enjoy the game all the more. So too in the church. Those who practice the faith grow, get better, and enjoy the game of life all the more.

The Christian life involves growth. And the Bible is clear about this. The goal isn't about being born again – it's about growing up. It's about becoming more and more like Jesus in our thoughts, words, and deeds. We are to grow up spiritually. So here are three things to remember.

**First**, we are all responsible for our own growth. We are in this together, to love and to care for each other, to encourage each other, to learn from each other. But ultimately each one of us is responsible for our own spiritual growth. As we say on the ball field – *You can do this...*

**Second**, growth is possible no matter how new or how long we've been on the team. Every one has potential to grow. God desires that we grow – that we mature into the likeness of Jesus. No one is left out of God's dream for an effective church. As we say on the ball field – *Play your position and communicate with your team mates...*

**Third**, growth takes place best as we participate in the faith community, in large and small group gatherings. We gather because that's where Jesus promises to meet us. We are the Lord's team and everyone on this team matters. If one member is missing then the team is incomplete. As we say on the ball field – *We are all on the same team. Everyone matters.*

Imagine if each one of us here today made a commitment to take one small step of faith this week, to grow into the likeness of Christ Jesus by practicing the faith by showing just a little more love, more joy, more peace, more patience, more kindness, more goodness, more faithfulness, more gentleness, more self-control. Imagine what would happen in the Myerstown area if all of us began to model that kind of growth with our families, our friends, and our neighbors.

That's God's game plan for us. There is no need for anyone to sit on bench. We are here to grow and we grow best by being out on the field -- out on the mission field that is. And the mission field starts at the front door of the church building.

Let's go! Let's grow! Amen.