

**40 DAYS OF PRAYER:  
DO YOU REALLY WANT TO GROW UP?**

Sermon written by Martha-Jean Fitch

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TEXT: Ephesians 4:1-3, 11-16

Good morning! How blessed we are to be back together for worship again this week. I am trusting that each of you had a great week last week and that you are ready today to be renewed and invigorated and challenged for the coming week.

I have to share that Greg and I had a very awesome week – and I just have to use a personal point of privilege and share some pictures! Last Sunday, we began watching our 2-year-old grandson Isaac for 3 days. He had never stayed at our home that long without his parents ... and I think I can speak for both of us that it was delightful! What a bundle of energy – and contagious laughter – and wonderful hugs! The reason that we were taking care of our grandson Isaac, was because his new baby sister, Elinor Josephine was born on Monday. What joy she brings to us especially to her parents – Mary and Jake Runge! Elinor in Hebrew means, “God is my light” – and truly she reflects a tiny light of God, fresh from heaven! We are so going to love being in their lives and watching them grow up.

Babies are so cute – and kids are delightful – but we they will grow up so fast – really in a blink of an eye! And that growth is God’s will for our lives. And just as God wants us to grow physically and emotionally throughout life – God wants *all* His children to grow spiritually... growing up in every way into Christ and living as a strong and mature women and men of God.

And truly that is the mission of our church that we have adopted –growing to be Spirit-filled, committed disciples of Christ.

Today, we begin a spiritual growth emphasis called the “40 days of prayer”. For 6 weeks, we will be looking at how to grow in our faith and our prayer life. And I am challenging us to unite together in prayer for 40 days – praying for renewal and mission for our church, community, and world. Throughout this pandemic, we have been struggling all throughout the world. Uncertainty, division - confusion about what truth is. And the church as a whole - everywhere - is hurting and in transition. We are in great need of renewal, refreshment, and revival. We need a fresh sense of God’s presence – and a fresh sense of what God is calling us to do. When you study any revival or renewal movement in history, you will discover that is always starts with prayer. And that is exactly what we are be called to do this fall – focus on prayer and spiritual growth – and pray for a breakthrough and revival for our church.

And so, today’s question for us is “Do You Really Want to Grow Up?” As we look at our children, we want them to grow up, don’t we? Think how exciting it is when they take that first step, speak their first words – to go to school and learn to read. And then kids get really excited about growing up. They say, “When I grow up, I want to be like Mommy or Daddy – or I want to be a fire fighter or a doctor.” They want to grow up and can’t wait until they can drive – or graduate – or become a grown-up. They have a great desire to grow.

In the same way - God wants His children to grow spiritually and have great joy and passion doing that! When we make our confession of faith and are born again – we are just spiritual infants, just beginning in our faith journey. But we can't just stay there as a child, never growing in our faith. We can't just simply sit and be spoon-fed and just depend on others to meet all your needs. No, we are called to grow and mature into a strong disciple, actively serving God.

In our passage today from Ephesians 4, we hear the Apostle Paul encouraging us to work together in unity and to grow up in Christ. Turn in your Bibles and follow along as I read several verses out of that fourth chapter, beginning at verse 1. I am going today from the Message Bible:

*1-3 In light of all this, here's what I want you to do. While I'm locked up here, a prisoner for the Master, I want you to get out there and walk—better yet, run! —on the road God called you to travel. I don't want any of you sitting around on your hands. I don't want anyone strolling off, down some path that goes nowhere. And mark that you do this with humility and discipline—not in fits and starts, but steadily, pouring yourselves out for each other in acts of love, alert at noticing differences and quick at mending fences.*

*11 He handed out gifts above and below, filled heaven with his gifts, filled earth with his gifts. He handed out gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor-teacher to train Christ's followers in skilled servant work, working within Christ's body, the church, until we're all moving rhythmically and easily with each other, efficient and graceful in response to God's Son, fully mature adults, fully developed within and without, fully alive like Christ.*

*14-16 No prolonged infancies among us, please. We'll not tolerate babes in the woods, small children who are easy prey for predators. God wants us to grow up, to know the whole truth and tell it in love—like Christ in everything. We take our lead from Christ, who is the source of everything we do. He keeps us in step with each other. His very breath and blood flow through us, nourishing us so that we will grow up healthy in God, robust in love.*

Our goal is to be “fully mature adults, fully developed within and without, fully alive like Christ.” God wants us to grow up and to be “like Christ in everything!” If we are immature babes in our faith, not growing at all, we can be easy prey for those who seek to deceive us – tossed to and fro by false teachings and imposters of the truth. And during difficult circumstances, we falter and stumble, because we have not built our faith up to give us strength, hope, and peace.

So just as a baby needs to do certain things and have certain experiences in order to grow physically – so too, do we as believers need specific habits to grow spiritually.

First, we need to be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit at work in us. Paul says in Ephesians that as we let His breath and blood flow through us – we can be healthy and strong in our faith journey. We can't grow without the work of the Holy Spirit in us. We have to surrender our lives to Him and ask Him to come and move in us and help us to grow, more toward the likeness of Jesus. It is only through His power and leading we will be able to do that.

And just as children need good habits as they grow, we also have several habits we need. In order to grow in spiritual maturity, we need to:

- 1) Eat – the Bible is our soul food... and we need to feed on God’s word - to study and meditate on it regularly. And by regularly, I mean, every day. Just as we can’t eat just once a week and expect to be nourished physically – we can’t just come to church once a week and never listen or study the Scriptures again until the next time we come to worship. As God told Joshua, as he prepared to take the leadership of the Israelites and lead them to the Promised Land, *“Study this book of instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do.”* (Joshua 1:8). God’s word is living and active – and it will guide us, direct our steps, and help us to know God’s good and perfect will. And it will act as a sword and shield to protect us every day, filling us with the words and promises of God.
- 2) To grow we also need to Breathe – and that is the habit of prayer. Just like when baby is born and everyone waits with great expectation to hear the baby take his/her first breath – that precious breath that gives and sustains life, so prayer is our lifeline to God. It is God with whom we live and move and have our being – and we have the privilege and honor to have immediate access to Him every moment of every day. Jesus says that we are to “pray at all times and never give up” (Luke 18:1) and to “draw near to Him and He will draw near to us.” (James 1:8) We are to pray without ceasing. Through our constant prayer, we will grow to maturity in our life of Christ.
- 3) To grow we need a caring family – and that is the fellowship we need with other believers. It is in a community of faith that we can learn and grow. We read in Acts how the early Christians were devoted to the teachings of the apostles’ teaching, and to fellowship and sharing in meals (including the Lord’s Supper) and to prayer – and they grew, and awe came upon them all. We need each other! We are called to motivate each other to acts of love and good works and not to neglect meeting with one another. We will encourage each other and help each other to grow in faith.
- 4) To grow we need regular exercise – and that is through service and giving. Just as our muscles would atrophy if we didn’t move and exercise, so too we need to get moving and being active in our faith. We are called to love our neighbor and care for those in need. Jesus tells us that grow in our faith when we reach out to help the hungry and thirsty, the stranger and naked, the sick and those in prison. When we give of ourselves, both in service and giving of our time and money, we give unto Jesus and our heart grows in love.

Food, breath, a caring family and exercise --- all habits that we need, to grow up physically – but also spiritually. And habits that we will be focusing on these 40 days of prayer. And you and I have a choice – will we grow? As Rick Warren says: *“Spiritual growth is not automatic. You must choose to grow. You must choose to do the habits. You must choose to make the effort. Now let me ask a very personal question. A year from today how different do*

*you intend to be? Do you intend to be stronger or still stuck in the same problems you are right now? You want to be more mature, or will you still be the way you are right now? It is your choice.”* How badly do you want to grow closer to God and be stronger in your faith?

The story is told of a little boy who fell out of bed. When asked what happened, he said, "I guess I just stayed too close to the gettin'-in place." That is exactly why many people fall away from God - they stay too close to the "gettin'-in" place and do not grow to maturity.

It is no shame to be a baby, if you were born a few months ago. But if a person has been a child of God for several years and has not grown, he/she has a problem. Everyone needs to grow as a Christian, and everyone can grow, if he/she simply applies the Bible principles of growth.

In Jeremiah 29:13, God says, *“You’ll find me when you get serious about finding me and want it more than anything else.”*

My great hope and prayer for you and for me – is that we will get serious about finding God and growing in our faith. It is only when we get serious about growing closer to God and living for Him, that our church will be revived and renewed.

What is your choice today? Are you ready to grow?

Let’s pray:

God, I pray a blessing on every person here as we go into the next 40 days. I pray we will go into this time with great expectation and desire to grow closer to You. I thank you in advance for the way You are going to work in our church and bring about renewal and revival. Help us to grow into strong and faithful men and women of God...fully alive like Christ. We place this church and every life into Your hands. Move in us and through us God and make us to be a blessing – as You have blessed us. We pray in the name of Christ Jesus our Lord. AMEN

## **INVITATION**

## **RESOURCES**

Two resources helped me in writing this sermon, in particular:

Rick Warren, *“Do You Really Want to Grow Up?”*, Sermon for the beginning of the 40 Days of Prayer Campaign. [www.pastors.com](http://www.pastors.com)

John Underhill, *“What Does it Take to Grow?”*. <https://bible.org/seriespage/what-does-it-take-grow>.