

illus: in the Fall of 1978, I entered Kindergarten at Invergarry Elementary. Kindergarten is a big deal, it's a watermark moment in a child's life—you've finally grown up enough to go to school. I was excited to go to school, to meet my teacher, to make new friends, and to learn how to read and write. My big brother already had two years under his belt and I couldn't wait to take my turn.

Every Fall I looked forward to the new school year. But every year there was one school ritual that I could have done without and it began that first year in Kindergarten—the class picture. If you take a look at the screen behind me, you can see my Kindergarten picture—*can anyone pick me out in the crowd?* As you can see from the picture, the bowl cut was a cutting edge hair style in 1978.

You may be wondering why I didn't like the class picture. It wasn't that I disliked the picture itself, it was the lining up that I couldn't stand. It was at the age of 5 that I first heard those dreaded words, *“Class, I want everyone to line up, shortest to tallest.”* As you can see from the picture, I was right near the front of the line.

Every year we would line up shortest to tallest, every year I hoped that I had grown a little, I prayed that I wouldn't be the shortest in the class. Fortunately Don would always win the gold medal for shortest student, another student would win the silver, but all the way from K-7 I was in the bronze medal position.

In the Fall of 1978, I watched every boy, except Don, file past me to take their spot near the back of the line. From my position at the front, they looked like giants, I'm sure some of them were already shaving. Is it true that tall people have more fun? It seemed true at the time.

I can remember thinking, I want to grow, I want to be taller, I want to be older. The funny thing about being young is that you spend so much time wishing you were older. When is that we stop wishing we were older and start wishing we were younger? When we're young, it's not the getting older that's the important part, it's the growing up we're after—growing up opens up new possibilities.

When a child is not growing—physically, intellectually, emotionally, and relationally—a parent becomes concerned. Growth is normal, it's an indicator of health; the absence of growth reveals that something is has gone wrong. My sermon this morning is entitled, *Growing Up*—it reflect the inner impulse that all of us had at one time, and, it reflects God's heart for all of us, no matter how old we may be. Growing up, maturing, is a part of God's plan

Are you growing in your relationship with God? Are you growing in your relationship with others? Are we growing together as a church? Growth doesn't just happen; even a physical body needs certain things in order to grow. In Ephesians 4, Paul tells us how a church grows, and, the necessary resources for our growth and maturity.

At this time, I'd like to invite you to open your Bibles to Ephesians 4:7-16; if you are using the Bible in the seat rack in front of you, you can find our text on page 948. **Read.**

7 But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. 8 This is why it says: 'When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people.' 9 (What does 'he ascended' mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? 10 He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.)

11 So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, 12 to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.

15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

What I want to do this morning is offer five brief points from this text, followed by an extended application. I'm going to begin in the middle of this text, vs. 12-13, with the goal of our growth, namely, maturity.

1. The Goal (maturity)—vs. 12-13. Throughout Paul's letters, the church is often referred to as "the body of Christ." Just like a human body is made up of many different parts, so too a church is comprised of many different members. And just as the body receives direction from the head (the brain), the church receives direction from her head—the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus' goal is a church that is growing up into maturity, a maturity marked by unity and fullness. My sermon last week addressed the theme of unity and so I won't offer much more on the subject here, other than to say that there is a difference between unity and

uniformity. We don't have to all be the same. The church, like a human body, needs diversity in order to grow and mature.

Let me talk for a brief moment about a maturity marked by "fullness". The standard for our "maturity" is found in Jesus—Paul speaks of becoming "*mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*" In Jesus we see humanity as God intended it. A person approaching maturity thinks, desires, speaks, and acts increasingly like Jesus. A church that is growing in maturity increasingly reflects the attitudes, priorities, and behaviours of Jesus, our Head.

2. The Danger of Immaturity— vs. 14. Let's turn our attention now to vs. 14 and to the consequence of immaturity. Paul offers three analogies that all draw the same conclusion—ignoring immaturity is dangerous.

A spiritually immature church is like a small infant—they are vulnerable to all kinds of forces. A spiritually immature church is like a boat being battered on the seas—they are overpowered by outside forces, unable to navigate through storms, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching. A spiritually immature church is like a gullible person—they are easily deceived, unable to distinguish between what is true and what is false. Growing up into maturity includes a growing discernment about who God is, what He's like, and how to align our thoughts, desires, and behaviour to Him.

John Calvin once said, "If God is our Father, then the Church is our Mother." What he meant was that our life in Christ is nurtured in the Church. When a child is first born they are beautiful, but completely helpless. They can't change themselves or feed themselves, they

can't talk or walk, but in a nurturing environment, they grow and learn at a rapid pace.

3. A Sign of Maturity—vs. 15. For the third point, turn your attention to vs. 15. Not only are truth and love critical for the growth of every church, but truth and love are evidences of growth. Christian maturity is evidenced by a commitment to knowing God's truth, the ability discern between what is true and what is false, and, the practice of speaking and receiving truth from one another. An "infant" is one who is vulnerable, who lacks wisdom (and hence guidance), and falls prey to self-deception or the deception of others.

Our capacity for deceiving ourselves and others is legendary—we run from the truth about ourselves and others if it is likely to cause us pain or require us to change. The short-term strategy of pretending we are better than we are—or know more than we do—is shortsighted; it's much better to simply embrace the truth. When we cast off truth, we find ourselves like a boat bouncing around on the waves, with nothing to steer by, and no destination in sight. Jesus once said that the truth is what sets us free; we cannot be free, or real, apart from a commitment to the truth.

But truth and love are not mutually exclusive, in fact, they are bound together in Jesus and work together as we grow up. Truth without love can unnecessarily hurt others; love without truth lapses is little more than sentimentalism. Both love and truth are needed if we intend to grow up into maturity, guarding the unity of the Spirit.

4. The Source of Maturity (Jesus)— vs. 16. Let's turn to vs. 16 and the source of growth and maturity, the Lord Jesus Himself. Paul writes, "*From him [Jesus] the whole body, joined and held together*

by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."

Later in Ephesians 5, Jesus is referred to as the head, and husband, of the church; it should not surprise us to hear that Jesus is responsible for the church's wellbeing, growth, and maturity. Paul uses this image of the church as Christ's body to express the reality that we are united to Christ and to one another. Though we are many, we form one body. It is as Jesus fills us, by the Holy Spirit, that the many are made one.

The whole purpose of this growing up is, of course, that we take our place as Jesus' body in the world. We are His hands to serve, His feet to walk with people, His mouth to speak of God's love for the world—our actions point to Him.

5. The Means for Maturity—vs. 7-12. And now for the final point, found in vs. 7-12: the means for maturity. I said earlier that growth and maturity doesn't just happen, but Jesus provides His body with everything it needs to grow.

In vs. 7-10, Paul draws upon a motif found in Psalm 68. God is described as a warrior-king who triumphs over His enemies. And like a king of old, He is depicted as returning from battle with the spoils of war. In the Ancient Near East, the king used these spoils to enrich his people, not simple to fill his own coffers. This is the point that Paul is making with respect to Jesus and His church.

Jesus descended from heaven to earth to do battle against sin, death, and the devil—this decisive battle was won when Jesus died on the cross. And three days later, Jesus was raised in victory from death to

life. Not long after that, He was raised in victory from earth to heaven. Vs. 10 portrays Jesus residing in the place of power, authority, and glory—He now fills the whole universe.

And from this place of victory and authority, He bestows gifts upon His church that will help them grow and mature. As it turns out, these “gifts” are people whom have been filled with the Holy Spirit’s power. And so while the goal is the growth and maturity of God’s people, God’s people themselves—empowered by the Holy Spirit to serve one another—are means by which we will grow up. Vs. 7 talks about the grace Jesus gives, but this “grace” is not the gift of salvation, but gifts for service.

In vs. 11, Paul names some of the people-gifts that have been given to the church: apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers. And notice their role in the church—to equip the church to serve one another, so that together we might grow into maturity. Can you imagine a human body where the eye only looks out for itself, or the ear doesn’t listen to the rest of the body? A body like this wouldn’t survive; the same is true of Christ’s body, the church.

I may a particular responsibility to teach and preach, but each of us is responsible for the growth and maturity of the church. Those who have been appointed as leaders are not responsible to do all the work but to equip each member—each of you has something to offer, something to bring, somewhere to serve; without your participation, we will not reach maturity.

Application: As I transition into the application, I want to draw you into the story of Moses, found in Exodus 3-4; he was a man used of God to accomplish His purposes. The Big Idea in this story is that

whatever we bring to God can become a tool in God’s hands for God’s purposes. The question is, *what will you bring to God?*

Moses began by bringing his excuses. **Excuse #1:** “You’ve got the wrong person God. I’ve got an anger problem. I’m a murderer. I’m a coward; I ran to save my own skin. I’m on Egypt’s ‘Most Wanted’ list. You should really choose someone else.” Note God’s response. *I know what you’ve done and I know who you are—that’s why I’ve chosen you—there’s more to you than anger and fear. I will go with you Moses and you will lead my people out of slavery.”*

Excuse #2: “God, I don’t have a deep enough relationship with You; people will ask questions about You that I won’t be able to answer.” Note God’s response. *“I will give you the words to say, the people will listen to you, and I will compel Pharaoh to let my people go.”*

This excuse seems particularly ironic in light of the rest of Moses’ story. Moses became known for a depth of intimacy with God that was unparalleled until the coming of Jesus. During the years Moses led Israel through the wilderness, he had a place he would go to meet with God—he would pitch a tent just outside of the camp. Exodus 33 tells us that whenever Moses entered the tent, a pillar of cloud would descend and hover at the entrance while the Lord spoke with Moses. Vs. 11 says, *“The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend.”* Moses disqualified himself because he had no vision for what God could make of him—most of us disqualify ourselves for the same reason.

Excuse #3: “They won’t believe that You’ve sent me.” Note God’s response. *“Moses, what’s that in your hand? It’s just an ordinary staff—or is it? Throw it on the ground and see what I can do.”* Moses

threw the staff on the ground and it transformed into a snake; when Moses grabbed it by the tail it transformed back into a staff. Everything is a miracle waiting to happen; whatever God touches is transformed, and becomes useful to accomplish His purposes.

Excuse #4: “I’m not very eloquent; I’d make a mess of things. Please send someone else.” Note God’s response. *“The Lord said to him, ‘Who gave human beings their mouths? ...Is it not I, the LORD? Now go; I will help you speak and teach you what to say.’”*

Like Moses, we’ve all got excuses. *I’m not strong enough. I’m not smart enough. I’m not gifted enough. I don’t have enough experience. I don’t have enough training. I’m too tired. I’m too busy. I’m too young. I’m too old. I’m too afraid.* Can’t you see? We’re looking at it the wrong way. When we begin with ourselves, we begin with limitation; when we begin with God, anything becomes possible.

One of the Hebrew names for God is El Shaddai—God Almighty. When He calls, He will raise us up. He will empower us for every task He sets before us.

Perhaps you see yourself with very little to offer—the question God posed to Moses is the question He poses to us: *what’s in your hand? If you bring it to Me, I can transform it!*

So bring God your time, your money, your gifts, and your passions; whatever we bring, God can use for His purposes. Your gift of mercy, or intercession, or service, or prophecy, or leadership, or healing, or generosity, or evangelism, or teaching are necessary for this church to move towards maturity.

God can work through your passions too. The Spirit can work through your passion for beauty, art, and creativity. He can work through your passion for truth, justice, and mercy. He can work through your passion for gardening, sport, or business. These passions bring us shoulder to shoulder with people inside and outside the church—people we can walk alongside. My passion for sport has connected me to people all over the North Shore who don’t know Jesus, people searching for the meaning and purpose Jesus provides, people with hurts that Jesus is able to heal.

God uses our gifts and passions, and when we release our wounds and weaknesses to Jesus, they hold the potential for powerful ministry. If you have experienced painful rejection, and, the radical embrace of Jesus, then you have something powerful to offer others. If you have experienced sickness, and, the healing/sustaining power of Jesus, then you have something powerful to offer others.

We have people leading Grief Share who have lost loved ones to death—their wound has become a place of ministry. We have members of our prayer ministry team that have known healing and sickness—their wound has become a place of ministry. Perhaps your wound will become the place of your ministry. Whatever we bring to Jesus can be touched, transformed, and put into service for His sake.

Every member of the body has something to offer, something to bring, somewhere to serve—without your participation, we will not reach maturity.

As I think about our vision of North Shore Alliance, 4 images come to mind—a **home**, a **hospital**, a **training centre**, and an **airport**.

A **Home** is about more than shelter—it's the place where relationships run deep. A shared meal, a helping hand, connecting in conversation, all of these things contribute to a sense of belonging. Our church is like a *home*—we offer people a place to belong. Ephesians reminds us that Jesus' death and resurrection make it possible for us to be invited into God's family—because of Jesus, we belong to God and to one another.

All of you have entered a home before—we simply walk through the front door—but there's a difference between entering a home and making yourself at home. If the extent of your involvement is attending church on Sundays, you may have walked through the door, but you haven't entered the living room—that's where the life happens; that's where you belong.

I want to invite you to move from the door into the living room. We want to celebrate your victories and mourn your losses; we want to walk with you through every season of the soul. Get involved in a small group, join an age level ministry, get involved in serving somewhere—these are just a few of the ways you can transition from guest to family member.

When I say the word “**Hospital**,” what comes to mind? We go to a hospital when our body breaks down. NSA is like a *hospital* in that we proclaim a message of help, hope, and healing for broken bodies, minds, hearts, and relationships. Jesus came to rescue, restore, and to heal humanity.

And while healing is the work of God, we've been invited us to participate in His work. Weekly we are praying for people's healing and we are seeing God meet people at their place of need. Through

ministries like Grief Share, Celebrate Recovery, and addiction support groups, we are providing environments where people can journey towards health. Most Wednesday afternoons we run a ministry for people trapped in the poverty cycle, and in Jesus name, we are providing love, support, and practical help.

But we need what you can bring—*what's in your hand?* When you bring it to God, He can touch it, transform it, and use it to fulfil His vision for our church.

A **Training Centre** has a unique purpose—learning, growth, change, and development. Our church is like a training centre in that we are coaching people in their pursuit of Jesus.

As I said earlier, growth is a sign of health, and Jesus intends for each of you to grow. The Holy Spirit intends to renovate your heart, your mind, your desires, your will, your words, and behaviour.

As a church, we want to experience the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. And to this end, we want to provide environments where you can grow in worship, prayer, and in your understanding of the scriptures. We want to help you discover your the gifts God has placed within you, so that you can serve others.

As a church, we function like a **home**, a **hospital**, a **training centre**, and an **airport**. An airport isn't a destination—it functions as a launching pad. Our church is like an airport in that we gather to worship, to connect, to get healed up, trained up, and then be sent out on mission.

We are training people to reach out to family, friends, neighbours, and colleagues. We are training people to share about Jesus, and, we are also building bridges into the community through Coffee Time, CityFest, school BBQ's, Street Soccer Tournament, SummerJam, and Flo Soccer Camps. We are also actively cultivating partnerships to bring the good of Jesus around the world. From planting indigenous churches, to partnering in health and education efforts, we have a vision to raise up and send our people out to join in God's mission.

We need what God has placed within you—come and be a part of what God is doing. Bring your gifts, your passion, your weakness and help our church to grow, mature, and attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Prayer

Worship

Benediction