

SERIES: Spiritual Growth

SERMON: Putting on the New Self

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 4:20-24

20 That, however, is not the way of life you learned 21 when you heard about Christ and were taught in Him, according to the truth that is in Jesus. 22 You were taught, to change the former way of life, to put off your old self, corrupted by deceitful desires, 23 and instead to be made new in the attitude of your minds by the Spirit; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

WED. BLURB: God has created you for a purpose. God's plan for you is more than it is right now. Following Jesus means changing and growing and becoming more like Him, and more the way God designed you to be. This Sunday we'll continue in our series of spiritual growth. Come and hear about the future and plan God has for you!

HYMN SING

GREETING

WELCOME TIME

WORSHIP SET

WORSHIP PRAYER & Kids Go to Kids' Church

OFFERING - Video

MISSION MOMENT: Action Pack - Amelia

PRAYER - Andrew Buschena

PP#1: Spiritual Growth: Putting on the New Self

“We will grow to become in every respect the mature body of Him who is the head, that is, Christ.” -Ephesians 4:15

Spiritual Growth: Putting on the New Self. Ephesians 4:15, “We will grow to become in every respect the mature body of Him who is the head, that is, Christ.”

This past week it has been the coldest of the winter so far. One morning as I looked outside to the temperature gauge I hung on one of the maple trees out front of our house, I saw the needle at about 15 below. Snow covered the ground, and the tree supporting the temperature gauge looked dead.

I walked into the dining room and looked out at the bird feeder I had filled just before Christmas. It was still full. Not many signs of life out there. Nothing seems to be alive outside.

I then walked into the kitchen and looked out back. My garden area looked dead. Nothing growing. And next to the garden was the apple tree in the back yard. And I remembered that it is just about time to get out there and trim the apple tree. In the pile of mail on the kitchen counter, I saw a seed catalog.

PP#2: *Image of a dormant, leafless apple tree, with snow on the ground.*

You see, even though it is cold, and everything looks dead, it's time to plan for growth. The trees, the ground, the grass, the shrubs, are still alive. They are actually growing. Resting is part of growing. My kids are telling me that in school they are learning that our bodies produce growth hormones while we sleep. In order to grow taller, kids need to sleep!

My apple tree, although it looks asleep, is growing. And it is at this time that I need to invest in it's growth. I need to get out there with my ladder and my clippers and get to work.

PP#3: *Image of someone up a ladder pruning an apple tree, bundled up, with snow on the ground.*

Growth takes work. If I want big, juicy, crunchy apples next October, I need to get busy now. Winter is the time for pruning. It's the time to prepare the tree for optimal fruit-growing next season. I need to guide the tree to put its best energy into apple bearing. That means trimming off the water sprouts—the branches that don't produce apples, the old branches that are damaged or weak, and the branches that are growing the wrong direction, are too high to reach, or are entangling other branches or blocking their sunlight. The tree is not really dormant. It's setting itself for the next season.

Last week, Amelia spoke to us about the biblical teaching of growing spiritually. Being a Christian is not just about what we believe. Yes, we believe that God is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We believe that Jesus is God's one and only Son, and only He is our personal Lord and Savior. We believe that the Holy Spirit lives in each one of us, applying into us God's forgiveness and life abundant and eternal. All this we believe.

PP#4: Ephesians 4:13-15

“...until we all reach unity in the faith...attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves....Instead, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of Him who is the head, that is, Christ.”

But being a Christian also means following Jesus. Its movement. It's actions. It's behaviors. What you believe in your head affects your heart, and your mouth, your hands, your feet. Faith in Jesus changes who you are, and what you do. This is what Paul was talking about in Ephesians, how Jesus-followers stop all their old ways of life. At the beginning of chapter 4, he encourages Jesus-followers to live a life worthy of their calling. He then talks about how Jesus equips His followers, building them up, until they all “attain the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:13) They will grow *from* being infants *into* maturity, in every aspect to be like Christ.

PP#5: Ephesians 4:17-18

17 So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. 18 They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.

That growth, says Paul, means to stop living like others in their culture, to stop living the like they used to. Following Jesus means growing more into the behaviors of Jesus.

Two thousand years ago, Paul said that the culture around them focused on selfishness. It encouraged people to give into their yearnings, to satisfy their wants, indulge in their sensual desires! Wow, for being written 2,000 years ago, this does a pretty good job of describing our current culture!

PP#6: Ephesians 4:20-24

20 That, however, is not the way of life you learned 21 when you heard about Christ and were taught in Him, according to the truth that is in Jesus. 22 You were taught, to change the former way of life, to put off your old self, corrupted by deceitful desires, 23 and instead to be made new in the attitude of your minds by the Spirit; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

But Christians don't. They *believe* differently, and they *behave* differently. Their faith changes their heads, their hearts, their hands, their mouths, their feet. The culture tells you to indulge in selfishness. Paul says, verse 20, "That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in Him, according to the truth that is in Jesus."

You were taught a new understanding, a new belief, a new truth that is in Jesus. And that learning changes the rest of you. Verse 22, "You were taught, to change the former way of life, to put off your old self, corrupted by deceitful desires, and instead to be made new in the attitude of your minds by the Spirit; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

PP#7: *Image of a person out in the snow, dressed in shorts and a t-shirt.*

Amelia used a memorable image for this. It's like being appropriately dressed. If we want to go outside on a cold day, we have to take off our house robe and slippers, and instead put on warm clothes, snow pants, boots, coat, mittens, hat and scarf.

Paul says that Jesus-followers take off our old selves and put on our new selves, the selves that are created to be like God, a new attitude, new selves that show righteousness and holiness. Righteousness, holiness is not something we believe in our minds. It's how we behave. Being righteous and holy means we *live differently* than those in the culture around us.

PP#8: Putting on the New Self

1. We are designed to grow

"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." -2 Peter 3:18

Christians grow. This is a hugely important part of our faith walks that we have to grab on to. God designed you for something more than you are right now. God created you with a plan, with an idea in His mind's eye, that you would, in your own unique way, embody Jesus. You're probably not there yet. Some of us have a ways to go! But God created us with an intention that is more awesome than we can imagine. We all try to guess what we're here for. We try to find our own way, following the selfish paths our culture says to follow. But you need to hear that God has a plan for you that fits, that feels right, that makes you feel complete and whole.

PP#9: *Image of young tree with just a couple of apples on it.*

We're like apple trees. We have been planted to grow fruit. We may be at different ages of maturity. I remember my father planting an apple tree when I was a boy. For the first five years, the young tree produced no apples. Then, in the sixth year, it produced three little apples. My father was so excited! We ate them with such ceremony you would have thought they were imported from some royal orchard somewhere. By the eighth year, we got a few bushels of apples. I'm sure by now, 30 years later, it's producing bumper crops every year.

My father planted a little sapling, but as he did, he could see, in his mind's eye, a mature apple tree laden with fruit. He had a plan for that scrawny sapling. He knew it's purpose. And that's why he was so excited about those three first apples. It was starting to live into its purpose. And my dad knew what was coming. He was excited.

God has plan for you. He can see it now already. He knows what you were created to be. You're not fully there yet. But God's excited about the first-fruits you are bearing.

PP#10: Put on the New Self

1. We are designed to grow
2. We need to nurture our growth

“Be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.” -Colossians 1:9-10

Every year my father tended his apple tree. He fertilized it. He sprayed it for bugs. He put a lining around its trunk to keep nibblers off. And during the winter months, when the tree looked dead and dormant, he pruned it. He cut away the branches that would only go to leaf and not bear fruit. He reinforced the main latticing of branches, giving priority to those branches that would produce what he wanted.

I've been pruning the apple tree in my back yard for three years now. When I first came here, I got apples the size of eggs off the tree. They were full of bugs and misshaped. A year ago I pruned it so severely that my wife gasped, sure that I had killed it. I took off more than I had left! My kids are starting to hate the pruning process, as they get to pick up all the branches. But this past year I picked some apples off the tree that were the size of those large apples in the grocery store. I also treated the tree for bugs. And many of my apples didn't have a spot on them.

We have to nurture our growth. God has a plan for us. And God has equipped us with what we need to grow. But we also need to nurture our growth. What are you doing, intentionally, to grow? Have you improved over the last year? Have you changed? In what ways? What are your new attitudes? What are the signs of your growth in holiness?

As Methodists, you see, we believe that we grow in holiness. God works on us, and we have to join in that work on us, too. Are you living less like the world around and more the way God plans for you to? What are the ways you take off your old clothes, and put on your new ones? What works?

PP#11: *An apple tree being watered, fenced, trunk wrapped, etc.*

My father cultivated his tree's growth by how he managed its resources. He limited some of the tree's own tendencies of growth. He removed the branches that would not bear fruit. He pruned the ones that would. He cut back what wasn't productive. He also applied fertilizer and water and bug treatments to encourage it to grow in healthy ways. He managed the resources of the tree, cutting back what wasn't the way he wanted it to grow, and invested in the ways he did want it to grow.

In order to grow spiritually, we need to manage the resources we invest into us. We need to cut back on what doesn't produce in us what we want. We need to limit selfish desires, days packed too full, spending all our monies on ourselves, running so much we don't have time for what shapes us. We need to prune.

And we need to add what grows us. We need more time in worship. We need more of our money given away. We need more community enriching us in ways that grow, in small groups that help shape us. We all need to be in a small group, a faith-forming small group, a group that doesn't just provide fellowship or learning, although they are important, but a group that really helps us change our behaviors, change how we live. Our small group needs to provide some measure of accountability for our spiritual growth. You need a group like this. If you're ready to join one, come talk to me, or Amelia, or Greg Klausen, and we'll get you in a group that can do this.

PP#12: Worship Plus Two (W+2)

- W Worship: Connect with God in community (Upward)
- + One thing: To help you grow (Inward)
- + One think: To help others (Outward)

I also want to pass along something that's a great way to cultivate spiritual growth. It's called, "Worship plus two." Each week, or every other week, depending on what your life's schedule is like, but on a regular basis, develop a cadence of "Worship plus two." Attend corporate worship, connect with God in community. The Bible says don't forsake community worship. We need it. Worship.

And then, do two more things. One thing you do to grow yourself inwardly. Do something that invests in your own personal relationship with Jesus. Attend a small group. Help out at Awana. Come to a Bible Study. Create a prayer space in your home and spend 20 minutes there. Meet with a neighbor to discuss a book on faith together. Do something that grows you inwardly.

And then, do something else that helps someone else. Do something that shares a blessing. Help serve at church. Show up to community care. Volunteer at scouts. Shovel your neighbor's driveway. Visit someone you don't know at a nursing home. Do something that reaches beyond you.

PP#13: Forest Hills Church

Love. Grow. Serve.
(Upward. Inward. Outward.)
Worship Plus Two

Worship plus two. We're going to start talking a lot about this here at church. Starting today! You're here at worship. Great! Off to an excellent start. Now, before you leave, consider, what will be your "plus two" this week? Look over the church calendar. You can start to get some ideas there.

Our church leadership is framing our church life into these three categories. We're calling it "Love. Grow. Serve." You'll start seeing these all over the place: on our web site, in our lobby, in all the ways we communicate. We think this really captures what it means to be a Christian community together, and growing. Love: God, others, self. Grow: in Christ, in holiness, in God's plan for you. Serve others by: reaching out in word, in actions, in attitudes. Love. Grow. Serve. Worship is a key way we love. Plus, one for you. Grow. Plus, one for others. Serve. "Love. Grow. Serve." "Worship Plus Two."

PP#14: Put on the New Self

1. We are designed to grow
2. We need to nurture our growth
3. We bear good fruit

"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." -Galatians 5:22-23

Apple trees can be beautiful in appearance. They can offer nice shade. But they key to an apple tree is to produce apples.

We can do many things as God's children. But the key for us, the Bible says, is for us, in this life, to bear spiritual fruit. This is what our love for God looks like in our daily lives. Just like I want large, juicy and delicious apples off my tree, so God wants good quality fruit from us. We are to grow, and our fruit is to improve.

Our fruit is how we bless others, how others see Jesus in us. The Bible talks about it as the fruit of the Spirit within us. According to Galatians 5:22, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” This is our harvest. This is what is to be big and delicious in our lives.

Others around us, you know, are fruit inspectors. They are looking at our fruit to see if what we claim to believe is true, if our walks match our words. Our goal is to produce those great big, crunchy, juicy apples everyone loves.

PP#15: *An apple tree full of big, red apples*

We are to called to put on our new selves. We are growing, you see, spiritually, from the way that the world sets us up to behave, and the way that God has planned for us to live. We are designed to grow. We need to be growing. We need to be different a year from now than we are now. Our behaviors need to change.

God has a design for us, a plan. It’s not what we are yet. It’s still coming. But we’re heading there. We need to continue to grow, and add our efforts to God’s efforts in our lives. Join a small group that holds you accountable. Worship plus two. Worship, plus one thing that grows you inwardly, and one thing that reaches out to help others. Bear good, sweet, wholesome fruit. So, when others get a taste of you around, they taste the sweetness of Jesus.

Amen.

CLOSING SONG

BENEDICTION

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR JAN. 24, 2016

Winter Series: “Spiritual Growth”

Sermon: Putting on the New Self

Scripture: Ephesians 4:20-24

Opening prayer

Introductions: Introduce yourself and share about a time you picked apples from a tree.

Background: Skim Ephesians 4:1-19. What is going on in this chapter?

Read: Ephesians 4:20-24

1. Verse 20. Describe the kind of life that Paul says is NOT the way they learned. How is that similar to aspects of our world/culture today?
2. Verse 21. What was the message about Christ they were taught? What is the truth that is in Jesus?
3. Verse 22. Describe the “old self” Paul mentions. Describe how you see this in your life?
4. Paul says we are to change, to put off our old ways. How can we do this? What are some ways that you have had success doing this? Describe some victories. What worked for you?
5. Verse 23. What does it mean to “be made new in the attitude of your minds by the Spirit”?
6. How does this happen? What is the role of the Spirit? Share a way that you have experienced this.
7. Verse 24. Describe the new self? What is righteousness and holiness? What does it look like?
8. What are some of the ways in your life that you live by a new self?
9. How do you do it? What advise could you give to a new Christian about this?
10. Application: What will you take away from this passage? How will you live it out?