

## **The Nurture of the Church** Ephesians 4 & Various Scriptures

**Intro** – Next week, we're going camping for a couple of days. This is the sort of annual Tolleson / Clancy GUYS campout. The boys and I, plus dad and Jenny's dad, brother, and uncle all get together for a couple of days in a state park somewhere.

But there is a pattern to the way these things get planned. We talk about whether or not we're going to do it in a particular year. Then we decide where we are all going to meet. Then we decide who's in charge of which meals. Then, at least at our house, we start going through the camping gear. It takes a fair bit of gear for all of us. But then we leave, we drive and get there and set up camp. But what is the reward? What is the thing that we've been looking forward to all this time? Sitting around the campfire at night with the guys!

And as we've been thinking together about the church and God's directions for His people, there is similar pattern. In some sense, we are all on a spiritual campout together. Let me explain what I mean...

First of all, we need to remember that we've already talked about the great calling that God has given to the church. Local churches are called to reflect God's character and image. His purpose is that we would be the reflecting pool through which the world sees His very glory and character displayed in this world.

And then last week we talked about how local churches fulfill that calling by worshiping God. This week we are going to talk about how as a church we can reflect God's character and glory to the world and to one another by nurture and discipleship and growing together in Christian love, and character, and maturity. And then next week we are going to see how God wants us to reflect His glory by reaching out in evangelism.

But for this week, we can kind of use the idea of a campout to organize our thoughts about discipleship and Christian nurture. We have to understand the DESTINATION of Christian nurture, where are we headed as church together. What is the goal of doing church together? Then we need to see a specific ROADMAP, how are we going to get there? This is the nuts and bolts of what churches ought to be doing. And then there is sort the "campfire" of church. The environment in which these things get accomplished.

There are many passages of Scripture that we could turn to, but to start with this morning, we are going to read together **Ephesians 4.1-16** as a foundational passage for understanding the NURTURE OF THE CHURCH...

### **Ephesians 4:1-16**

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup>with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup>eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup>There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— <sup>5</sup>one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup>one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. <sup>7</sup>But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. <sup>8</sup>Therefore it says,

"When he ascended on high he led a host of captives,  
and he gave gifts to men."

<sup>9</sup>(In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? <sup>10</sup>He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might

fill all things.) <sup>11</sup>And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup>until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, <sup>14</sup>so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. <sup>15</sup>Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup>from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

**Transition** – So how does this passage describe the destination that we are headed for?

### 1. The DESTINATION of Christian Nurture:

The destination of Christian nurture and discipleship can be described with two words: UNITY and MATURITY...

- a. Christian unity – Did you notice all emphasis on unity in the passage from Ephesians 4?
  - **Verses 4-6** emphasis that our unity is based upon the unity of the Godhead. There is one Spirit, one Lord, one God and Father of all. Therefore we are described as one body, and we all have one hope, and we experience one faith and one baptism.
  - And then in **verses 12-13** the “equipping of the saints, the work of the ministry, and the building up of the body of Christ” is to go on “until we attain the unity of the faith”.
  - So the purpose for discipleship, for teaching, praying, obeying the Bible, accountability, small groups, Bible studies, the purpose for all these things is Christian unity in the church!
  - And then the second part of the destination of discipleship is...
  
- b. Christian maturity
  - Again in our passage from **Ephesians 4, verse 13** also indicates that the reason for the “equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ” is for the body of Christ to attain “mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”
  - In other words, the second purpose for teaching, small groups, prayer, Bible study, and obedient living is so that the church would become mature like the very “fullness of Christ”!
  - Now, we need to understand a couple of things about Christian maturity...
    - i. Maturity is both... individual and corporate...
      - individual –

**Colossians 1:28-29** - Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. <sup>29</sup>For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

Paul is simply saying that he labors diligently to present individual believers mature in Jesus Christ.

And at the same time, Christian maturity is...

- corporate - Ephesians 4.11-16  
All of these passages in **Ephesians 4** are talking about how the church grows to maturity together. Notice **verses 15-16** –

<sup>15</sup>Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup>from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. And then we should ask ourselves what does Christian maturity look like...

- ii. Author Edmund Clowney points out that Christian maturity is... knowing the Lord, doing the will of the Lord, and being like the Lord.
  - Knowing the Lord means a relationship with God that is deep and authentic.
  - Doing the will of the Lord means obedience and a lifestyle of holiness.
  - And being like the Lord means, well, what we've been saying all along. Having the character of God shine through us.

- b. **Illustration** – You know how sometimes people take a road trip and they don't really have a destination in mind? Our dear friends Wilmer and Anna Mae used to do that. He told me a number of times how they would just get in the car, and they would decide whether they were headed north, south, east, or west. And they would just go and enjoy the experience. Well, the journey of Christian discipleship is just the opposite. This is not a careless ride. It is a journey with a specific destination. And that destination is both personal and corporate. Christian nurture is headed for unity in the church and maturity as believers.
- c. **Application** – So are you on the road or in the ditch? When we are on a trip, we don't get anywhere without putting some fuel in the tank, checking the air in the tires, checking the oil in the engine and getting behind the wheel and getting going.
  - Are you motivated to grow as a Christian?
  - Are you motivated to pursue unity in Community Bible Church?
  - Are you steering away from evil influences for the purpose of growing in Christ?
  - Are you pursuing Christian growth by reading and obeying the Bible?
  - Do you have some specific traveling companions that pray with you and for you for spiritual needs?
  - Listen to me very carefully. The purpose for all of the ministry of the church to believers, the destination for all personal spiritual discipline is nothing less than "to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ." In other words, without Christian unity in the church and without Christian maturity in our lives, we will NEVER reflect the glory and character of Christ in our world! If we are not serious about unity and maturity, then we are a careless church and we are living sub-Christian lives.
- d. **Transition** – Now, I've been "pounding the pulpit" about the importance of maturity and unity, but how does this thing of doing church together get us there? What is the road map?

## 2. The ROADMAP of Christian Nurture:

- There are a number of things that churches must do in ministry to one another. And all of these things can be seen in "family terms". These are things that parents would provide for their children.
- There are a couple of verses in 1 Thessalonians where Paul actually talks about how he was like a spiritual parent to the Christians in their city:

**1 Thessalonians 2:7** - But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.

**1 Thessalonians 2:11-12** - For you know how, like a father with his children, <sup>12</sup>we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

- So what are the "parental" care matters that we need to provide for one another within the church? We could list them as FEEDING, PROTECTING, GUIDING, CORRECTING...

- c. **feeding** – The foundation of health is basic nutrition. It is my responsibility, and the responsibility of everyone involved in leading a class or Bible study to FEED the family of God!

- From the very beginning Jesus gave this responsibility. In **Matthew 28.19-20** Jesus said, "God therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit teaching them to observe all that I have command you..."
- It is the responsibility of the leadership of this church to set the table and serve the food. And it is your responsibility to listen, learn, obey the Word, and grow!
- And I need to be very blunt at this point. To be honest, I'm concerned about some of your church attendance. Skipping church is like skipping meals. There may be many reasons why you CAN'T attend, but if we are not prevented from coming, we should be in here.
- What happens is that we become spiritually anemic and we don't even know it.
- Are you feeding on the nutrition that God is providing you through the ministry of your church?
- Another thing that we receive from the ministry of the church is...

d. protecting – Again, like parents would protect their children with their very lives, we need to protect one another from false teaching and from moral compromise.

- When Paul was saying his farewell to the elders of the church of Ephesus, he strongly warned them against false teachers trying to harm the church...

**Acts 20:28-30** - Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. <sup>29</sup>I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; <sup>30</sup>and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

- There are plenty of false teachers, and plenty of temptations that would draw us away from God and from the faith. We receive protection from falsehood by believing the truth! We receive protection from compromise by relationships within the church. We all need the elders of the church and we need some close friends who are helping watch out for our souls.

e. guiding – Parents also guide their children. We seek to lead them in what is right and good. When it comes to the church, this is where the terminology of "flock" and "shepherd" come in. Listen to the word written by the apostle Peter...

**1 Peter 5:1-3** - So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

- Again, it is the responsibility of the elders to guild the church. This of course doesn't mean that we are bossy and tell everybody how to live their lives. But it does mean that when it comes to spiritual matters, you would be open to the counsel of one of the elders. Let me tell you how you could thrill the heart of the elders: share some basic spiritual needs with the elder that leads you CARE Group, ask them to pray for you, and then ask them how you can grow spiritually in that area!
- That is what basic spiritual guidance is all about. Elders need to know how to do that Biblically and effectively, and you need to be receptive to that kind of spiritual leadership.
- Another thing that parents provide for their children is...

f. correcting – We all need correcting from time to time. **Galatians 6.1** is a key passage on this...

- "Brother, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him

in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.”

- There are going to be times when spiritual correction needs to come. The church cannot give up on church discipline. And did you notice the implication that even spiritual people who at some times may need to gently correct and restore a wayward Christian, may at other times need that very correction themselves.

- We all need loving correction at times.

- g. So the destination of Christian discipleship is:
  - i. Church unity and...
  - ii. Christian maturity...
- h. And the roadmap of Christian discipleship or church nurturing is:
  - i. FEEDING
  - ii. PROTECTING
  - iii. GUIDING
  - iv. CORRECTING...
- i. But there is one more thing that we need to talk about this morning...

### **3. The ENVIRONMENT of Christian Nurture:**

- a. Just like on the camping trips that I've described, the real "camping" happens around the campfire. All of the unity and growing in maturity, and all of the spiritual nurturing happens in an environment of fellowship.

This is really talking about all the "one-another" commandments of the New Testament.

- i. love one another
  - ii. serve one another
  - iii. bear with one another
  - iv. esteem one another
- b. But there are basically 4 of these that I want to highlight this morning because they are imperative for spiritual growth in the church: PRAYER, ENCOURAGEMENT, SERVICE, and LOVE.
  - i. PRAYER – Without prayer we will not grow as individuals, and without prayer our church will not grow in unity and spiritual maturity.
  - ii. ENCOURAGEMENT is like the fertilizer that plants need or the vitamins that our bodies need. Sometimes, we come to church, and we are being fed the Word of God, but a word of encouragement is exactly what someone needs to keep on going or to move on to the next step of obedience.
  - iii. SERVICE – We are called to serve one another because Christ served us. Sometimes, part of being the church is simply serving a meal or sweeping a sidewalk.
  - iv. LOVE – Jesus said that people would know that we belong to Him by our love for one another. And we don't love one another because we all so wonderful and loveable. Quite frankly, most of the time, we're not! We love one another because God has loved us in our wretched, undeserving state. And out of just being astounded at God's love, we are compelled to love one another.
  - v. And then finally, I need to mention one more thing...

- c. **IDENTITY** – One of the neat things about raising kids is how they learn their identity. As we sit around the table there are conversations, as we drive down the road there are stories told, as we dry the dishes there are jokes laughed at. In a healthy family, a thousand different things help kids recognize who they are, and where they belong. And these things that I've mentioned, prayer, encouragement, service and love, that provide the environment for Christian growth. They help young Christians recognize who they are in Christ. It is as they hear other Christian pray, it is as they see love, sacrifice and service, it is as they see encouragement flowing among the people that they learn the glory of what it means to be the church! What happens "around the campfire" is super important!
- d. **Application** – We are not all called to preach or teach, we are not all called to provide the church discipline when it is needed or the counseling when it is needed. But we are all called to provide the environment, the fertile soil where Christian growth happens.

#### **Conclusion –**

- Are you contributing to the unity of Community Bible Church?
  - How are you protecting the peace?
  - How are you investing in relationships within the church to build up the body of believers that Christ has called together here in this place?
- Are you contributing to your own maturity and growth in the faith?
- Are you contributing to the maturity of the church?
  - How are you receiving the preaching and teaching?
  - Are you asking your elders for wisdom and counsel when needed?
- And then are you serving someone? Do you love people in the church? Do you encourage anyone, or do you just expect encouragement? Are you praying for others spiritual needs?
- Let's pray...