

## THE BON AIR PULPIT

James D. Pardue, Pastor

Sermon: *The Ingredients for Growing Up*

Scripture: *Ephesians 4: 7-13*

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When I was a teenager and going to be away from my family for a while, my parents would often use the little phrase, "Remember who you are." I first thought the translation of that little phrase was, "Remember we are your parents and do not embarrass us." Though my mother and father had never studied the psychology of self-identity, they understood it very well. They understand that if you don't define yourself, others will define you. What you think about yourself largely determines how you act towards others. *So one of the things that we as Christians need to understand is who we are.* Last week when we turned to Ephesians, Chapter 4, we looked at that passage of Scripture that said *you are to walk worthy of the calling to which you have been called.* Christians need to know who they are.

There is a *second principle* that needs to guide Christians' lives; that is, *you also need to know what God is trying to make you.* We are a working process. God is in the business of shaping and molding us to help us to become something that we are not now. Someone has said Christians are three people at the same time. We are not who we used to be. We are not who we want to be, but, thank God, we are not what we one day will be. God is in the business of leading us and directing us and shaping us. One of the reasons that we as

Christians often frustrate ourselves in our aimlessness is that we don't know what God is trying to do with us. If you don't know what God is trying to do, then you know no way in which to cooperate with Him. Many times God is trying to say to us, "Let Me tell you what I am trying to do with you. Let Me tell you what I am trying to make you." Then you will have the opportunity to cooperate with Him. So the question we want to ask this morning is: what is God really trying to do, and how does He go about doing it? Once I understand that, then I can cooperate with Him. So, if you will, take your Bible, and turn to the Book of Ephesians, Chapter 4. Turn down to verse 13 where *you will find three things that God is trying to do in your life. Then He is going to tell you the two ways in which He does it.*

Notice the *first* one. *He says that you may reach the unity in your faith.* Now, unity has no meaning unless you put the prefix *com* in front of it--*community*. What God is trying to do is teach you relationships--how you can live with others. What God is trying to accomplish in all of our lives is to teach us how we can live in a unique, growing, loving relationship with other people who are believers in Christ. You see, Christian faith is not just you and your relationship to God. It is not a lone-ranger sort of faith, but rather it is a faith that begins to express itself in the lives of other people. When I lived in Germany, my church was in a little village called Einsiglahauf. *Einsigla* is a *hermit*. *Hauf* is a *place*. *Einsiglahauf* is a *place* where a *hermit* used to live. In Jesus there are no Einsiglahaufs. Christianity is no hermit religion. It is being able to work and to live with others. *What He says He wants to do in your life is to teach you how to build relationships with others.*

Many of the children in the room do not know Jimmy Durante, who was a vaudeville star who made it on to the television era. After the Second World War, he was on a USO tour. Those

in charge said to him, "Mr. Durante, we have a lot of places we need to go. Please know you have a specified length of time for your act. When it is over, you go out that door, and there will be a man who will greet you and take you to your next place." Mr. Durante said, "I understand." But when the time came for him to leave, no Mr. Durante came out the door. Finally the man came inside and said, "Mr. Durante, we have to leave. You are expected somewhere else. What is wrong?" He said, "Look. Look at those two fellows." On the front row there was a man who in the war had lost one arm. Sitting next to him was a man who had lost another arm. But after Mr. Durante had sung and done his act, they were clapping. One used one hand, and one used the other. They were giving applause. *You see, what God is trying to do is take broken people and teach us how together we can give glory to Him. What He is trying to do is to teach us how we can love each other and how we can live with each other.*

I am always amazed at all the different kinds of people that God brings together. It is a miracle that we can all work together. I am told that in one of Dagmar's operas there are over a million notes. If you were to go and hear it, you would first hear the different instruments tuning and practicing; you would hear the bassoon, the violin, the brass, and you would say, "How can all of these instruments, and all these pages of notes, ever make any sense at all?" But when the conductor arises and begins to lead, then there is beautiful music. It is a symphony. The symphony is what God is trying to develop in my life and yours. He is trying to get us to know how to live and to work with people--all kinds of folks. There is a little doggerel that says, "To live with the saints above, that will be glory, but to live with the saints below, well, that's another story." Because we understand that while God wants to lead us to work together, sometimes it is difficult to do. There is a little phrase among Baptists that says the only thing that

two Baptists can agree on is what the third Baptist ought to give. Sometimes it is very, very difficult for us to be able to blend our lives and to work together. But please understand that God is trying to teach us to understand that *whose* we are is more important than *who* we are. And that *our relationships to each other pale into insignificance as we stand together in His presence and realize that we are all His children.*

Notice the *second* thing He is trying to do in your life. The second thing He is trying to do in your life *is to help you grow in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature.* He is trying to help you to grow up. I am reminded of the little boy who just learned that he had graduated from first grade. He went to his teacher, and told her, "I am so glad you were my teacher in the first grade. I am sorry that you don't know enough to be my teacher in the second grade." Children never recognize that they are on a life-long study. When you become an adult, you begin to understand how much more you need to learn. In Christ, as you begin to work with Him, you begin to understand how much more that you need to know. It is a process of always reaching out and always learning. They used to say at our commencements, "Your education is not over, it is just beginning." Those of us who have been away from commencements for a while understand how true that is. Life is a life-long process, and God is in the process of helping you to grow. *Adults are people who are always growing, always developing. Adults are people, however, who also are committed to some things.* They have come to some conclusions in life. They have gone through being a child--where you learn lots of things--to being a teenager--where you experiment with a lot of things--to being an adult--where you say, "This is what I believe." God wants to raise up some people who have planted some roots, who know what they believe, and who are not swayed by all of the various things that come to them.

There is another thing, however, that is symbolic of adults; that is, *they are responsible*. They know if anything is going to get done, everybody has to work together. Everybody has to do it together. God is trying to help you to grow up and to become mature. So let me ask you this morning: how old are you as a Christian? Would you say, "I am still a child," "I'm still a teenager," or would you say, "I am in the process of becoming mature in Christ." *God is trying to help you to grow up.*

Notice the *third* thing He is trying to do. *He is trying to help you attain to the measure of the fullness of Christ.* I think you know the word Christian--Christ-ian. *Ian* is the diminutive of the first part. *A Christian is a small Jesus.* He is somebody who is trying to become like Jesus. He is somebody who is trying to grow so that in all of the relationships of his life, someone could look at him and say to him, "You know, you remind me of what a person ought to be who follows Jesus Christ." Let me help you. When you think about following Jesus and looking at what He is, you look at His *inward* life, and you look at His *outward* life. *Inward* life simply was: all of his life he wanted to obey God. If you were to look in His spirit, you would understand that all of His life, that is what he wanted. *Lord, today I want to do Your will.* You can determine you are like Him if you look on the inside and say, "Lord, today I really want to obey You."

The second thing is to look at his *outward* life. His *outward* like was that He was always investing Himself in others. It didn't make any difference who they were, what their circumstances of life, He was always outside of Himself, looking at others. And to the degree that you are investing yourself in others you are beginning to understand what Christ is really about.

Now notice it again: what is Christ trying to do in your life? *He is trying to teach you how to live in community. He is trying to teach you how to grow up. He is trying to teach you how you can become like Him.* That is what He is trying to do. To the degree that you cooperate with Him, to that degree you will be able to grow. How does He do it? If you will turn back up to verse 7, He will tell you how He does it. How He does it is that *He gives you a special ability to serve God and to serve others.* God never says to you, "This is what I want you to do," without providing you the resources to do it. What He wants to give you is a special ability, a gift, a talent that enables you to serve God and serve others in His strength. What you need to understand is there is a law in the spiritual life. It is this. *The more you give away to others, the stronger you become yourself.* Sometimes people say to me, "You know what I am going to do? I am going to learn to get real strong, and then I am going to get involved in others." I tell them it works just the opposite. What you do is you get involved in others, and what happens is you become stronger yourself. The more you give away, the more you have. The more you take this gift that God has given you and invest it in others, the stronger you are going to find yourself. God did not give you the gift for your enjoyment, but for your employment. He wants you to get involved in the lives of others. When you do that, you are going to find that you are strong. If you have been given this gift and you don't use it, you can never grow. Just as God gave you a muscle, and the only way you can develop it is use it, God gave you a gift, and the only way you can develop it is to use it. That is the reason that every Sunday I challenge people to come to be a part of this church family. Why do I do that? The reason I do it is because if you are a believer, the only way that you are going to be able to grow in your Christian life is to find some avenue of service. If you don't find it and don't become involved, you can come and watch for a hundred years but you will never be able to

become all that God wants you to be.

Members of this congregation are aware that my daughter left a couple of months ago to go to be a missionary in Mozambique. As all missionaries have told them, culture shock always lasts for months. You have to get used to all of the things that are there. You don't know the language. You don't know the culture. You don't know what is expected. So, like all missionaries, my family has gone through culture shock. But this week I received e-mail. God did a wonderful thing when he invented e-mail. I laughed with my daughter, because I am more in contact with her now than when she lived in North Carolina. You know, I just pick up e-mail. In an e-mail this week she said there came a knock on her door. The pastor of the church they go to was there, and said, "We need your help." She looked outside and she saw two African men. She said they were walking skeletons. They were fleeing from the war in the Sudan. They were trying to get somewhere where they had family. But the amazing thing was they only spoke English. In Mozambique they only speak Portuguese. So the pastor knocked on my son-in-law's and daughter's room and said, "Can you come and help?" The pastor gave them some money. They got them some food, gave them a Scripture in English, put them on a bus, and saw them on their way. My daughter said, "That was the source of the greatest joy we have had since we have been here." Now why? Because they got out of themselves and invested themselves in others.

*God has given you a gift. God has given you an ability. You will never develop and grow until you utilize that for others.* What you need to find is a church family where you can become involved and help. I say to people, "I don't know if God wants you here or not. Only God can tell you that. But if God doesn't want you here, find somewhere where God wants you. Plant your life. Get involved. Use what God has given you."

The *second* thing that He does is not only put something in you, *He puts people around you.* Listen to the next verse. "*He gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers to prepare God's people to do their work of service.*" God has sent people to help you in your spiritual journey. I am sorry that there are some individuals who think they can be as good a believer by not getting around other Christians. Well, I want to tell you, they know a lot more than God knows about them. Because what God knows is that everybody needs somebody to help them. Everybody needs somebody to help them on their journey. Everybody needs a teacher. Everybody needs an encourager. Everybody needs somebody to challenge them. The only way you can have that is to gather around other people who can help you. In my life I was a sophomore in college. I had plans to do all kinds of other things. For over a year I wrestled, and finally God said, "I want you to be a pastor." I literally believe that God worked in my life and gave me a very special assignment. The special assignment is that I could be one of those who could turn to others and say, "I haven't come to do your work. I have come to be your helper and your encourager so you can do your work." God has sent all kinds of people to this church. That is the reason you need to come to worship. You need to get involved in Bible study. You need to be around other encouragers. You need to be involved in ministry. Because the way God works is that He has sent these people to try to be of help to you. God wants to do something in your life. God wants to develop you and grow you. He has very specific goals for you. The way he does that is to say, "I have given you a gift. Now come and give it back to Me. I have sent people to help you. Join them, hand in hand." If you are really interested in growing, come and place your gifts with the other people in this church who have their gifts. God has sent people here to help. Come and be here and to help us as we seek to

serve God together. I believe that God continues to put people in this room so He can call them to develop people and become instruments He can use to impact this entire community for Christ. I want to ask you today. Are you willing to let God do His work in your life? Are you willing to follow His method? His method is get outside of yourself. Learn from others, and serve others in Christ's name. That's my challenge.