

Hope Church South Haven September 6th 2026

Life is better together: WE GROW TOGETHER

Ephesians 4:11–16

Last week we started this series called LIFE IS BETTER TOGETHER. And we started with one pretty simple idea:

You need people. And people need you.

The question last week was: **WHO ARE MY PEOPLE?** Who knows me? Who notices when I'm missing? Who celebrates with me? Who shows up when everything falls apart? Because **ATTENDING** and **BELONGING** are not the same thing.

- ATTENDING is being in the room.
- BELONGING is being known.

But I need to add something to what I said last week. Belonging is risky. Because PEOPLE **are messy**. CHURCHES **are messy**. Hope Church **is messy**. At some point, this church is going to **disappoint** you. I'm going to **disappoint** you. Somebody sitting near you is going to **disappoint** you. That's what happens when you *take the risk of doing life* with a bunch of

people you didn't choose. There's a line I come back to whenever I get FRUSTRATED with the church:

Whenever I start to doubt the grace of God, I look at the church. Two thousand years of **imperfect people getting things wrong**. Hurting each other. Making a mess of things. And somehow, *Jesus is still building his church. Still building His Kingdom through us*. If that doesn't convince you that the grace of God is amazing, I don't know what will.

So why do we bother with this? **Why church?** Why take the risk of knowing people and letting them know you?

- Because it's about more than friendship and support.
- More than having people to laugh with or somebody who shows up when life falls apart.

Those things matter. A lot. But according to the New Testament, there's an EVEN DEEPER REASON we need each other:

We need each other to grow.

And that's what I want to talk about today.

I'm not a very sentimental person. But one of the things I regret about moving around so much when our kids were little is that *we missed out on something a lot of families have*.

That doorframe. You know what I'm talking about.

- *A name. A date. A little pencil mark.*
- Every few months you stand the kid against the wall: Stand straight. Heels down.
No, you cannot stand on your toes.
- And you make another mark.
- Here's what's interesting about that doorframe: **the kid never notices themselves growing.**
- Growth happens SLOWLY. QUIETLY. Almost UNNOTICED.
- Until somebody else stands you against the wall, *makes another pencil mark* and says: Look at that. You've grown.

And I think following Jesus works a lot like that. We're NOT ALWAYS VERY GOOD at **seeing our own growth**. And we're EVEN WORSE at seeing the *places where we still need to grow*.

We need other people for that.

- People who **know us**.

- People who **encourage us**.
- People who **challenge us**.
- People who **see things in us** that we simply *cannot see ourselves*.

Because there are some things about our growth that we will never see by ourselves.

So last week the question was: **who are my people?**

Today the question is: **who is helping me become more like Jesus?**

And before we read **EPHESIANS 4**, let me be honest about something:

Listening to SERMONS **will not, by itself, make you more like Jesus**.

Great job-security pitch for the pastor.

- SERMONS matter. WORSHIP matters. But you can **listen to a sermon every Sunday** and still not grow.
- You can have **four Bible apps on your phone** and not grow.
- You can **know Reformed theology** and not grow.

Because **INFORMATION** and **TRANSFORMATION** are not the same thing. And we confuse them all the time.

'I learned something today, therefore I grew today.'

Maybe. But maybe not. Because the GOAL OF FOLLOWING JESUS isn't simply **to know more about Jesus**. The GOAL is to become more like Jesus. And it is possible to *spend years around Christianity* **without being changed**.

That's what Paul is addressing in **EPHESIANS 4**.

- He's writing to Christians in Ephesus. A MAJOR ROMAN CITY dominated by the **worship of Artemis** and *filled* with competing religious voices.
- Artemis wasn't just part of the religion of Ephesus. **She was woven into everyday life of the city**. Your WORK and your FRIENDSHIPS and your REPUTATION and even YOUR FAMILY LIFE was connected to her worship.
- And right in the middle of that city was this small church. **Jews and Gentiles**. People from completely different backgrounds. People who under normal circumstances probably never would have chosen each other.
- And they were trying to figure out: **How do we grow in our faith in a world like this?**

Listen to Paul's answer.

Verses 11–16:

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 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. //

// 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. 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. //

// 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.

Ephesians 4:11-16 NIV

Paul uses an image they would have immediately understood: **THE BODY**. The Romans used that image *to describe the hierarchy in society*.

- Some people were the head – **more important**.
- Others were the hands and feet – **less important**.

The message was basically: *Know your place. Do your job. Don't complain.*

But Paul flips it. The church is a body but there are **no unimportant parts**. It doesn't grow because a *few important people do all the work*. It grows when **every part contributes** and **helps the others grow**. Everyone matters!

And I want you to notice TWO THINGS today.

#1 Don't just get older in church. Become more like Jesus.

Look at VERSE 13. Paul says: *Become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

Paul is describing our destination. Our destination is not a PLACE. It is a PERSON. **Jesus.**

God's *desire* for us isn't simply that we believe in Jesus and then spend the next forty years hanging around church waiting to go to heaven.

God wants to do something IN you. *God wants to do something IN me.*

- He wants to shape us and challenge us and heal things in us and change things in us.
- He wants to make us more **loving** and **patient** and **generous** and **forgiving** and **courageous** and **humble**.
- *Make us more like the Jesus.* The Jesus we discover in the Gospels...

That is spiritual growth. The GOAL ISN'T becoming more religious. The GOAL ISN'T becoming really good at church. **The goal is Jesus.**

Which means we probably need a better way of measuring spiritual growth.

- Not how much *Bible do I know* or how many *sermons have I heard* or how long I have *attended church*?
- But am I **becoming more like Jesus**?
 - ⇒ Am I more PATIENT than I was five years ago?
 - ⇒ Do I FORGIVE faster?
 - ⇒ Am I less DEFENSIVE?
 - ⇒ Do I APOLOGIZE quicker?
 - ⇒ Am I becoming SOFTER toward people or HARDER?

And maybe the hardest question:

Do the people who live with me **experience more of Jesus in me** today than they did five years ago?

Because they know. My spouse knows. My kids know. The people I work with know.

- You can know more theology than you did five years ago and **still be just as angry.**
- You can know your Bible better and **still be just as proud.**
- You can attend church every Sunday and **still carry the same bitterness** you carried TEN YEARS AGO.

Getting older in church is not the same thing as **growing in Jesus.**

And Paul gives us this brilliant image for this. He says immature Christians are: *Tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching.*

I love that image. They're MOVING. There's PLENTY HAPPENING. *But movement isn't necessarily growth.*

- One week it's this **podcast**.
- Next week it's the **video somebody sent you**.
- Then it's whatever **confident voice showed up in your feed** and sounded convincing.

Always moving. Never grounded. Never changing. And Paul essentially says:

Grow up. Get grounded. Know Jesus. Become like Jesus.

Become the kind of person who isn't carried away by every new voice that comes along.

Here's the first question I want you to take home:

Where is Jesus changing me right now?

Not five years ago. Not when you first became a Christian. Right now.

- Where is Jesus confronting something in you?
- Where is he softening you?
- Where is he teaching you to forgive?
- Where is he asking you to trust him?
- Where are you becoming more like him?

And if your answer is: *I honestly don't know.* Maybe that deserves some attention.

But here's the frustrating part. **God usually doesn't do that work in isolation. He uses people.**

Which brings us to the second thing.

#2 Stop trying to become like Jesus alone.

Look at how this passage begins: *So Christ himself gave.*

Jesus gives his church people. DIFFERENT **people** with DIFFERENT **gifts** and DIFFERENT **roles**.

And verse 12 tells us why: *To equip his people.*

That completely changes how we think about church. Church isn't a **few professional Christians** doing CHRISTIANITY while everybody else watches.

- I'm not paid to *follow Jesus for you*.
- My job is to **help you follow Jesus**.

Because throughout this passage, **Christ is growing a body**. People growing people.

Think about how that ACTUALLY WORKS.

- You can read about patience by yourself. But eventually you're **going to need an annoying person** if you want to become patient.
- You can read a book about forgiveness. Eventually **somebody must hurt you**.
- You can study humility. Eventually **somebody must tell you**: You're wrong.
- You can study love. Eventually you **must love an actual human being**.
 - ⇒ And actual human beings are INCONVENIENT.
 - ⇒ They DISAGREE with you.
 - ⇒ They DISAPPOINT you.

⇒ They VOTE DIFFERENTLY than you.

⇒ They DON'T TEXT back.

And maybe some of the people who frustrate you most aren't INTERRUPTIONS to your spiritual growth. **Maybe God is using them as part of it.**

Paul says we grow by: *Speaking the truth in love.*

- We need people who love us enough to say: I'm here. I'm not going anywhere. I see God doing something in you. Don't quit. Keep going.
- We need people who love us enough to say: **I'm worried about you. You're becoming bitter. You need to apologize. Your marriage needs some attention. I don't think you're seeing this clearly.**

Paul's picture isn't just me becoming a better Christian. It's all of us helping each other become more like Jesus.

Which leads to the second question:

Who knows me well enough to tell me the truth?

Not whose podcast you listen to. Not whose books you read. Not which preacher shows up in your feed.

Who **knows you**? Who **knows what you're afraid of**? Who has **permission to say something** you might not want to hear?

Because Christian content can't do that.

- A podcast can't notice that you've gotten harder over the last two years.
- An app can't sit across the table from you and say: Hey. Can I tell you what I'm seeing?

I think that's one of the **great dangers of Christianity in the age of algorithms**. I can customize my entire spiritual life.

- I listen to the preacher I like and the worship music I like and the authors I agree with.
- I follow people who think like me.
- I unfollow the people who annoy me.

And eventually I can **create a version of Christianity** where *everybody agrees with me*, and *nobody knows me*.

That's not discipleship. That's comfort.

Who in your life cannot be unfollowed? Who in your life cannot be canceled? Who gets to **disagree with you**? Who gets to **challenge you**?

Who gets to say: *Anton, I love you, but I think you're wrong.*

That is one of God's gifts to us: actual people. We *can hide in church* for years. You *can sit in the same seat* and *sing the same songs* and *drink the same coffee*. You can be **surrounded by Christians** and still not become more like Jesus.

The goal is NEVER *more church stuff*. The goal is relationships that help us **become more like Jesus**.

- Maybe that's a **small group**.
- Maybe it's **three people having breakfast**.
- Maybe it's **somebody you meet with once a month**.

THE STRUCTURE ISN'T THE POINT.

The question is: **Who knows me and who is helping me follow Jesus?** And eventually that turns around. The people who help me grow become people I help to grow.

Paul says the whole body grows: *As each part does its work*. That's you. That's me. That's church. Not spectators watching a few people do ministry. **It's people helping people follow Jesus.**

But I need to make something clear. None of this earns you Jesus. Jesus doesn't wait for you to **get your life together** *before he loves you*.

Look at the people he started with.

- PETER and JAMES and JOHN and THOMAS.
- They were proud and competitive and confused and impulsive and doubting.

And **Jesus stayed with them**. He *loved* them. *Corrected* them. *Forgave* them. *Shaped* them. And ultimately, he went to the cross for them. Because our deepest need isn't better habits. **We need grace**. We need forgiveness. *We need God*.

CHRISTIAN MATURITY isn't earning the love of Jesus.

CHRISTIAN MATURITY is what slowly happens *when people who are already loved by Jesus keep following Jesus together* (x2!).

Let's go back to that **DOORFRAME**. Imagine your name on it. And today we make a pencil mark. Your spiritual growth.

Now imagine five years from now we make another one. What do you hope has changed?

- Your *temper*?
- Your *bitterness*?
- Your *need to be right*?
- Your *fear*?
- The thing *you keep hiding*?

Five more years in church. **Will the pencil mark have moved?** Or be in the same spot as it is today?

I don't want that for you. **And I don't want that for Hope Church.** I don't want us simply to be a church where people come. *I want us to be a church where people change* and become more like Jesus.

- Where angry people **become gentler.**
- Where proud people **learn to apologize.**
- Where lonely people **become known.**
- Where bitter people **forgive.**
- Where frightened people **become courageous.**
- Where people loved by Jesus **learn to love somebody else.**

Don't leave today asking: *Was that a good sermon?*

Leave asking two questions:

- Where is Jesus changing me?
- **Who knows me well enough to help me get there?**

If you don't have an answer to that second question, *maybe that's your next step.*

Find somebody. Open your life. Tell the truth. Let yourself be known.

And then, AS JESUS CHANGES YOU, **turn around and help somebody else.** Because

five years from now, I want somebody who loves you *to look at your life*, point to that NEW

PENCIL MARK and say: **Look at that. Jesus has changed you.**

That's GROWTH. And we *don't get there alone.*

We belong together. **We grow together.**