

# Inch by Inch Growth

Vulnerable Children ► United Men

## Prayer Intro

Pray that God would speak to us tonight.

I pray that tonight would be useful and beneficial to all of us here.

**We pray, open the Bible to us tonight Lord.**

– Sharpen our minds and soften our hearts.

**Holy Spirit, you are so welcome here among us.**

– speak to us, be with us, grow us we pray

Pray that I would speak clearly, and make sense.

That the Holy Spirit would move in us.

**Tonight I wanted to revisit some of the points** covered in the last few weeks of the Ephesians series, **and fire it precisely at you guys,** students and 20s.

**There was this one line in Ephesians 4** that Graham read out and that **really punched out** at me from this passage: **Eph 4:11-16.**

It's on the topic of growth and maturity.

And it's this picture of gradually growing from little children to strong men (and women).

Let's start by reading it together:

"And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 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, 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. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 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." [Ephesians 4:11-16](#)

If you are anything like me you'll get **total brain overload** when you read a text like this.

The whole book of Ephesians is a bit **like having a piano dropped on your head.**

There's so much there, all at once. It's sort of overwhelming and you drop everything. You don't quite understand it on your first read.

You have to **read it over and over, gradually picking it up** piece by piece until you slot it all together and gain the understanding.

**If we zoom in and run our highlighter over the key phrases, we start to get an idea of what it's all about.**

"until we all attain to the unity of the faith  
... to mature manhood, to the measure of  
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that we may no longer be children, tossed  
to and fro by the waves ... we are to grow  
up in every way into him who is the head,  
into Christ"

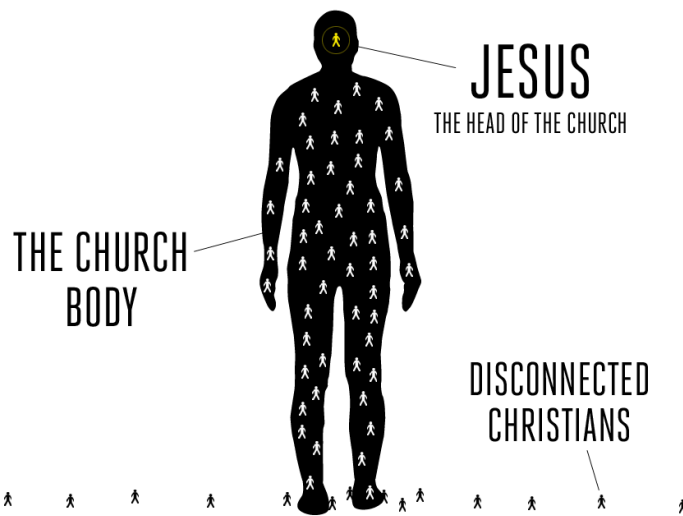
**This whole passage is about growth and unity.** About God's plan for us as we follow Christ.

**It's what God's calling you to.**

So one picture you get in the text is that of a growing body.

This body is the church. We're growing in unity, in knowledge, in stature. The head of this body is Jesus Christ.

The picture I've come up with from this text is an attempt at a visual illustration of what's going on.



This body has Jesus as the head, but the rest of the body is composed of us, the church.

The shape of the body only takes its form as we come together and are united.

As we do, there's a strength and stature that starts to develop.

It works in two ways.

**1) you are strengthened by the church.** By friendships, fellowship with all sorts of people. Young, old, all walks of life. People you wouldn't normally hang out with.

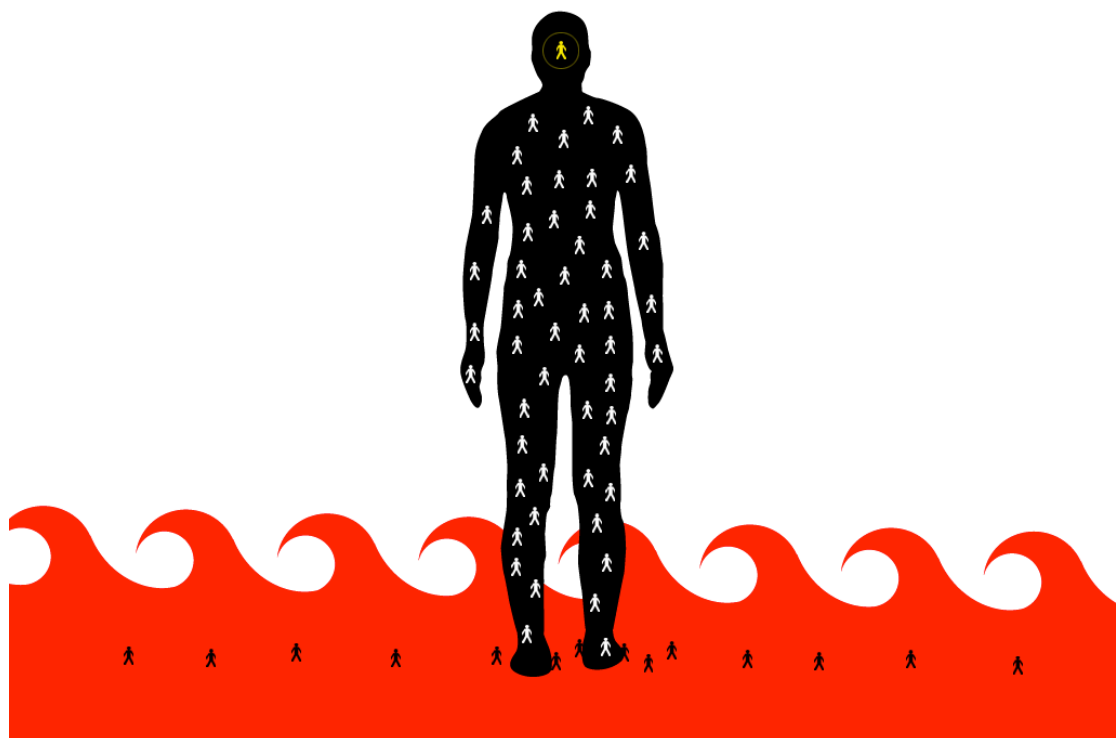
**- More connections + deeper relationships = increasing strength**  
eg older guys > their faith has been tested more thoroughly, they have lived through more experiences > they bring strength to you

**2) you strengthen the church in return.** By plugging in and getting involved, you can become an integral part of something much, much bigger. The physical mass of the church grows

Two heads are better than one. 800 are even better still.

The more people that are united together, the greater the mass, and strength of this body.

Nothing great in this life is ever accomplished by a single person.



What you also notice is that if you are outside of this body you're really very exposed.

Like being lost at sea in a storm (and that's the picture in the text).

“so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine”

If you're displaced from the church, you're out there on your own, weak, vulnerable.

Easy pickings for the world and the enemy. You won't last long.

Twenties are a real stage of transition (eg our lifegroup turnover!).  
– 40 to 60 people through the group in the last three years.

University and jobs – people are constantly moving location.

It's so easy to leave one church and not really get settled in a new one.

**And then we become these disconnected Christians,** weak and vulnerable.

**Q:** So the first question is this: is always being a part of a local church high on your priority list?

Whether you're leaving Eastbourne, or you've just arrived.

**If you're a fresher at University this year.**

– We'd really encourage you to not only get involved yourself, but to rope in all those other stragglers on campus who profess to be Christians but are really lazy about joining a church. Drag them along!

**The transition to Uni can be one of the biggest turning points.**

No longer propped up by your parents faith, **it's like all the scaffolding has been removed.**

You either stand or fall.

Some peeps are just a bit lazy, or way too laid back.

Looking back over **the last 10-12 years, I'm amazed at how many people needed just the slightest of nudges** to get stuck in church.

A little challenge, or an invite. And it changes the whole course of the rest of their lives.

Back to the text...

"...to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves..."

The next thing that jumps out at you from this section of Scripture is the contrast of language.

**You've got a call from being little children to mature manhood.**

It occurred to me that part of being a child is thinking you don't need to grow, or to be united with the church body.

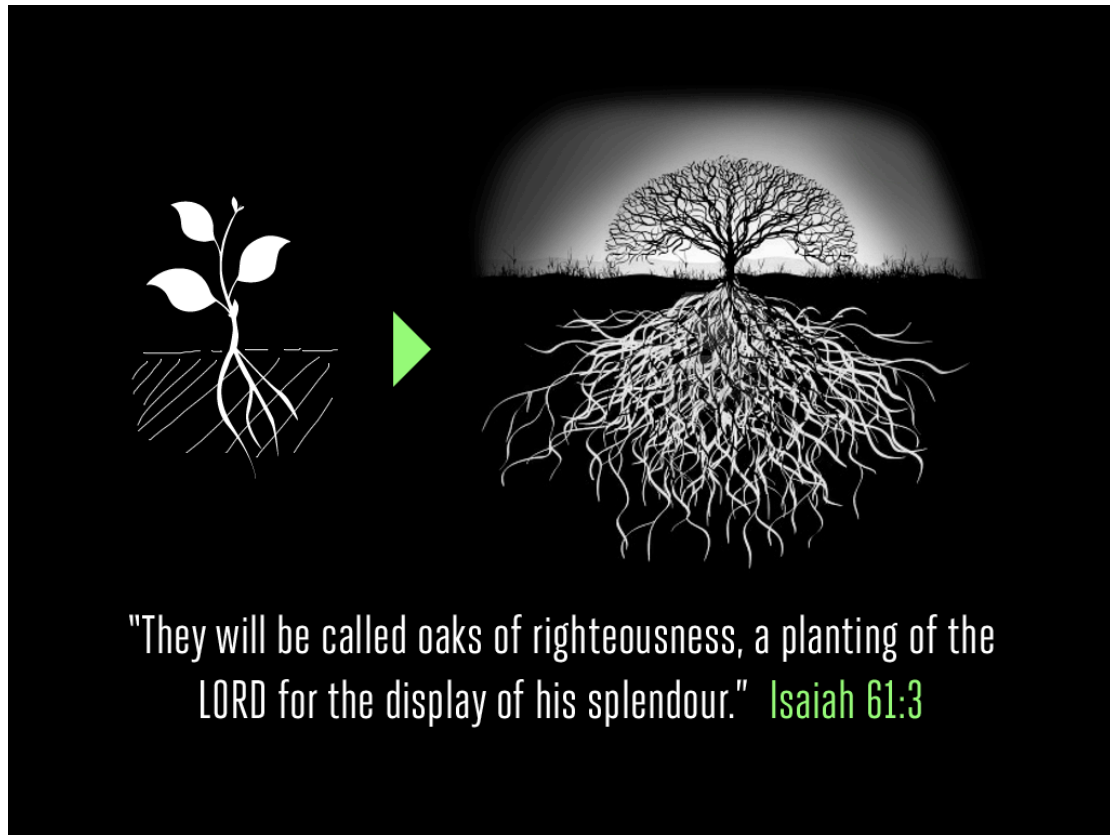
There's just something about that phrase "mature manhood" that really appeals.

There's a **real solid strength** behind that term. Like there's a **bulk of spiritual muscle** that's developed over the years. You can handle all sorts of situations, trials, challenges and disasters that a childish faith never could.

Maturity is exactly what we're shooting for as students and 20s.



Most of life is slow, hard growth.



This is another **great image of growth and maturity** we get from the bible.

**When we start out as Christians, we're like little saplings.** They're tiny, and easily trodden on and up-rooted.

But **over the years there's this real slow, gradual growth** that takes place. **Roots going down, branches growing up, and the trunk thickening.**

Gradually it becomes this massive, unshakable oak tree. It's totally solid and not easily moved. Even in a hurricane they're not easily uprooted.

And that is the exactly the goal for each one of us.

None of that happens overnight (we all love the radical conversion stories).

But that's not the day-to-day nature of growth and maturity as a Christian.

By virtue of being in our 20s, it's hard to know if that mature, oak-like state is physically possible in our stage of life.

I'm convinced that it's growth **cultivated over years and years**, and we are all on a journey there.

And actually, **while there's breath in your lungs**, God's calling you to greater levels maturity and holiness.

Like the tree – **all the while it's alive it continues to grow** bigger and thicker. **When it stops growing it begins to die.**

It's a process that doesn't actually finish in this life. So even when you're all wrinkly and old in your 90s, God's still got lessons to teach you.

"...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure"

Philippians 2:12-13

Time for an unnerving bible verse, just to keep you on your toes.

I've been thinking about this verse for years. It's once of those verses that gets **lodged in the back of your mind.**

This verse is found in the book of Philippians, written by the Apostle Paul to some of the most commendable group of Christians found in the NT.

There's not a word of criticism to the Philippians. They are absolutely outstanding. If ever there was a group of believers that should be totally sure that they are saved, it's these guys.

And yet Paul tells them 'continue to work it out with fear and trembling'.

Why does he talk like that? It's really quite unnerving!

Here's my take on it. It's easy to mis-read.

What Paul is saying is not, 'continue to work out *whether or not you are saved* with fear and trembling'

but

continue to work out *this salvation that you already possess* with fear and trembling."

**As a Christian, God is a masterful artist, at work in your life** by the power of the Holy Spirit. **He's shaping you, moulding you.**

Don't mess it up.

In fact, fear God and yield to his work. It's so easy to resist.

You get the sense that salvation is an on-going process. There is the pivotal point where it starts, and your name is written in the Book Of Life.

But salvation then works itself out in your life.

It's a journey that's unfolding over the course of our lives.

The act of following Christ implies motion and direction.

One foot in front of the other. As we do that, Jesus leads us out of on-going sin...

Which is why it goes on to say in Ephesians 5:

"For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God." **Ephesians 5:5**

"Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God." **1 Corinthians 6:9-10**

**Here's the challenge:**

If time goes by... 2 years, 5 years, 10 years... you initially gave your life to Christ, but have remained exactly as you were, can you really say you have been following Christ?

If we truly follow Jesus, he takes us out of drunkenness, sexual sin, greed, dishonesty. As a way of life we lead those things behind.

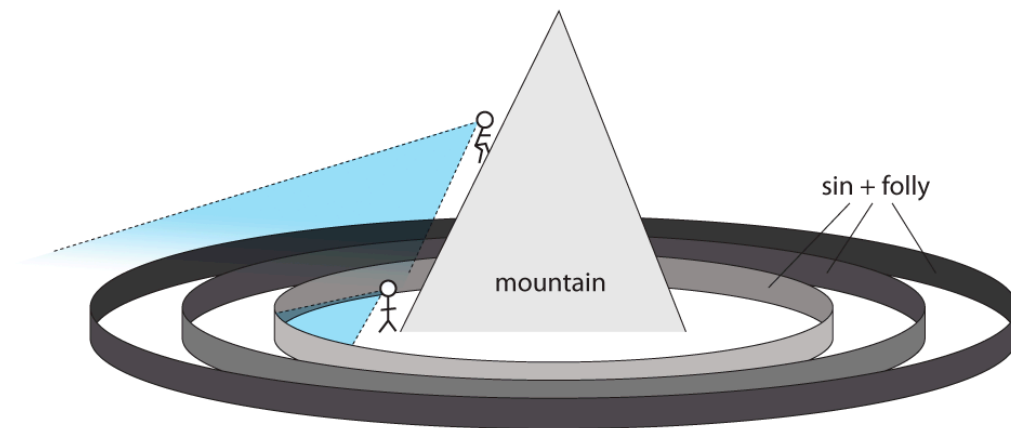
If we refuse and resist him, can we really say he is our Lord?

So here's my second question:

**Q: What is Jesus leading you out of? Have you been following and obeying faithfully?**

What things immediately spring to mind?

Is there anything that strikes you and you think "yes, that needs to go"



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Here's an illustration that hopefully will help you picture this growth in maturity.

Over a number of years I've increasingly pictured the path of following Jesus like climbing a mountain.

When you first become a Christian, it's like you start this walk of following Jesus. You've become aware of the immediate and most obvious sins that are around you.

Such as sexual immorality, drunkenness, lying and cheating.

But as you mature and travel further up this path, your perspective changes. You increasingly begin seeing things from God's perspective.

Interestingly, I've heard wisdom described as "thinking God's thoughts after Him".

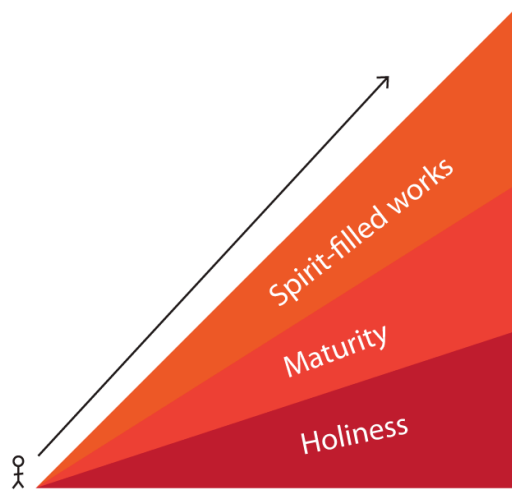
As you mature and look back over your life, more and more sins come into view.

**Things you never even considered now look ugly.**

You think "I can't believe I used to say those jokes, I can't believe I actually used to think like that, behave like that".

The mark of a maturing Christian is increasing holiness, an increasing awareness of sin, and increasing revelation of God's grace.

Lastly, I believe there's a real connection between holiness, maturity, and the filling of the Holy Spirit.



It's like they all work in concert. One leads to more of the other, and they all grow together.

No one is a prerequisite for the other.

We heard a brilliant talk from Andrew Wilson a few weeks back on "The Holy Spirit In God's People"

Just to touch on this issue, we don't need to be sinless to be filled with the Holy Spirit. But we do need to face Jesus. We need to not be preoccupied with things that grieve him and hurt him.

The more we turn from our sin and face Jesus, the more ready we are to do his work. And the more we will need of the Holy Spirit.

So this call to maturity is not purely for it's own sake. Maturity and usefulness to God are tied together.