

# *Overcoming Arrested Development*

*Ephesians 4:1, and intro to Ephesians*

## Introduction:

### **PPT #1—Arrested Development**

One of my sons Justin's favourite TV shows is ***Arrested Development***. This three season show aired between 2003 and 2006 and earned six Emmy awards, one Golden Globe and was listed as one of Time magazine's "100 Best TV Shows of All time".

The show's storyline centered on the Bluth family, a formerly wealthy, habitually dysfunctional family. The father, Michael, always strives to do the right thing and keep the family together despite their materialism, selfishness, and manipulative natures.

The teenage son a decent lad feels a constant pressure to live up to his father's expectations, and is often reluctant to follow his father's plans. The grandparents, George and Lucille, go to considerable lengths to manipulate and control his family and are hypercritical of every member of her family. Lucille is also an alcoholic. Her domineering and sheltering of her youngest son Byron has resulted in an unstable, socially inept young man prone to panic attacks.

Michael has an older brother is Gob whose name is an acronym for George Oscar Bluth II, and pronounced *Jōb*, but frequently mispronounced as *Gōb*. Gob is an unsuccessful professional magician whose business and personal schemes usually fail as He uses a Segway for transportation, from which he converses when it is stopped as if it were a pulpit.

Michael's twin sister Lindsay is flamboyant and materialistic, enjoys being objectified while protesting. She is attracted to various social causes, usually for about a week. She is married to Tobias a discredited psychiatrist, aspiring actor, who suffers from gymnophobia, a fear of nudity.

Rounding out the main characters is Lindsay and Tobias' attention-starved teenage daughter Mae nicknamed "Maebby" who skips school, cheats on homework, and steals money from the family's frozen banana stand business.

All families have a measure of dysfunction. I've said several times that no person or family is more than 80% functional. We all exhibit a measure of arrested development. It is good to be able to laugh at our dysfunction in the midst of accepting it. It is also a good thing to be able to recognize arrested development and seek to grow through it—not just as individuals, but as families and communities. You remember Cap's third "C" in our purpose for existence—called to celebrate Christ and change lives. The thing with arrested development is that you can't grow past it if you focus directly on it. You have to have a vision of maturity, health, functionality to be able to grow.

#### **PPT #2--title**

Today we are beginning a series that will take us to Advent titled *Overcoming Arrested Development* during which we are going to explore the first 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of the Bible's letter to the Ephesians.

The primary reason for doing this series comes from the leadership. In January of 2009, the leaders and pastors of Cap spent a day in retreat. This was our first retreat in the transition following Paddy's retirement. Our agenda was, "What's next for Cap?" We began our retreat with listening prayer around the bible text of Ephesians 4:1-16. We read the text, sat in silence asking God to speak to impress upon us what we needed to know for this time.

#### **PPT #3-#10--text**

Let's listen to the text, then I will share with you the things God impressed upon us.

*<sup>1-3</sup>In light of all this, here's what I want you to do. While I'm locked up here, a prisoner for the Master, I want you to get out there and walk—better yet, run!—*

*on the road God called you to travel. I don't want any of you sitting around on your hands. I don't want anyone strolling off, down some path that goes nowhere. And mark that you do this with humility and discipline—not in fits and starts, but steadily, pouring yourselves out for each other in acts of love, alert at noticing differences and quick at mending fences.*

*<sup>4-6</sup>You were all called to travel on the same road and in the same direction, so stay together, both outwardly and inwardly. You have one Master, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who rules over all, works through all, and is present in all. Everything you are and think and do is permeated with Oneness.*

*<sup>7-13</sup>But that doesn't mean you should all look and speak and act the same. Out of the generosity of Christ, each of us is given his own gift. The text for this is,*

*He climbed the high mountain,  
He captured the enemy and seized the booty,  
He handed it all out in gifts to the people.*

*Is it not true that the One who climbed up also climbed down, down to the valley of earth? And the One who climbed down is the One who climbed back up, up to highest heaven. He handed out gifts above and below, filled heaven with his gifts, filled earth with his gifts. He handed out gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor-teacher to train Christ's followers in skilled servant work, working within Christ's body, the church, until we're all moving rhythmically and easily with each other, efficient and graceful in response to God's Son, fully mature adults, fully developed within and without, fully alive like Christ.*

*<sup>14-16</sup>No prolonged infancies among us, please. We'll not tolerate babes in the woods, small children who are an easy mark for impostors. [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 men in their deceitful scheming.NIV] God wants us to grow up, to know the whole truth and tell it in love—like Christ in everything. We take our lead from Christ, who is the source of everything we do. He keeps us in step with each other. His very breath and blood flow through us, nourishing us so that we will grow up healthy in God, robust in love.*

God impressed lots of truths upon us individually

- There is a dual equipping going on here—Christ equips us; we are to equip you to live Christian lives
- Growth is a dynamic experience—from Christ and into Christ. Nothing static here.
- We have a vision here for maturity in v. 14ff--, *to know the whole truth and tell it in love—like Christ in everything*

There were many more good truths God impress upon us, but there was one truth—one thing we felt was particularly true for Cap. This caught all of the leaders' attention and there was both unspoken and spoken agreement that for this leadership team and this transition, this was our calling.

Lest you get the wrong impression, “revelations” like this almost always come in general terms—it is up to us to then follow the Spirit and use wisdom to work it out.

### **PPT #12—it is time**

*It is time to grow up at Cap—time to grow up into Christ--time to know the whole truth and tell it in love—time to live and mature.*

So the focus was on maturity. Our teaching series over the last 1.5 years; Sue's work with families; the work with teens and putting our youth young adult team in place for this year; the mentoring program have all been toward this goal.

Now it is time to pause and look again at this call and take stock of where we at and the maturity we are called to. There is no better place to turn to if one wants to understand Christian maturity than the Bible's letter to the Ephesians.

### **PPT #13--map**

There are 15 named churches in the New Testament [Rome, Corinth, Thessalonica, Galatia, Philippi, Colossae, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis; Philadelphia, Laodicea, Antioch, Jerusalem, Crete]. All but two [Antioch and Jerusalem] had letters addressed to

them by the first century apostles of Christ. The Ephesian letter is the only one that is not provoked by some problem of behaviour or belief. It is likely that this letter was a general church letter that circulated among many first century congregations.

By and large the first century churches were a mess. Corinth was fractured into warring subgroups; Colossae was muddled in esoteric philosophy; the Galatians were going backwards away from grace and into law and guilt; the Romans were incarnating the gospel by accepting both Jews and Gentiles into the community, but having a hard time finding common ground in Christ; and on it goes—it is not an overstatement to say that the church was a mess. If anyone says to you they simply want this church to be a New Testament church—ask them what particular mess they had in mind.

Because Ephesians was not written to deal with the human problems that inevitably rise up in churches the author comes at the experience of Christ in community from a completely different angle—from the vantage point of the nature and glory of God which gives the church its identity and its call to maturity. Here we see a vision about Christian maturity that is community based. Here we can see how individuals mature because of what God does in them in community. Here we see how the Spirit of God works in every community. Studying the letter to the Ephesians will give us eyes to see things about maturing in Christ we will find nowhere else.

A word of caution before we begin—don't idealize the church at Ephesus as the one to imitate. We are not studying this letter for that. The Christian community at Ephesus was "in process" just as every Christian community is. In the book of Revelation the church at Ephesus was commended for its patient endurance, but reminded that it has "abandoned the love you had at first"—something they had in considerable measure and had lost.

**PPT #14--Maturity**

So right out of the gate we know that maturity is not about perfection. Maturity is about growth in a direction--Even if the path is windy; even if the path has relapses. Maturity is about the direction in which we are headed not where the path is turning at this moment.

### **PPT #15--text**

How does Ephesians help us out here? Consider this verse. Eph. 4: 1

*As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received*

### **PPT #16--scales**

The Greek word translated into English as “worthy” is *axios*. This is a “picture” word in Greek. An *axios* is a set of balancing scales. You can picture in your mind the kind of scales with two pans suspended from a crossbeam balanced on a post.

To find something of equal measure you put say a one pound weight in one pan and then measure out say a pile of raisins until you two pans are in balance. Then you know you have a pound of raisins. The unknown weight is equal to the know weight. The two items are of equal weight; equal value—or according to the Greek word—they are *axios*—worthy. Even though these two items are very different, they balance, they are in line, and they “fit”.

### **PPT #17—Eph. 4:1**

The items balanced in Ephesians scales are God’s calling and human living. A better translation would be, “*I beg you to walk [peripateo] worthy [axios] of the calling to which you have been called [kaleo].*” When our walking and God’s call are in balance or have the same weight, we are whole or mature—we are living responsively to God’s calling; living congruent with the ways God calls us into being. Axios, worthy—mature, healthy, robust.

The message to Ephesians pivots on this word and this metaphor. Here is a definition of maturity. Here is a vision of maturity which the rest of the letter will unpack and expound. Ephesians really falls into two sections—God’s calling [chapters 1-3] and our walking [chapters 4-6]. The letter is intended to be applied so that your experience of God’s call and your lifestyle are moving toward the equilibrium Paul calls maturity.

### **PPT #18—Pix of scales**

So you can easily see from this that spiritual maturity is not the same thing as depth of knowledge. It is responding to God’s call.

One of our resources for this series is Eugene Peterson’s study on Ephesians entitled Practice Resurrection. Here is a portion of what he says about God’s call [p. 32];

*God calls us. He doesn’t hand out information to us. He doesn’t explain. He neither condemns nor excuses. He calls...in the garden Adam destroyed the equilibrium between God’s call and his walk by disobeying God’s command.*

*Abraham was called to leave his country and go to a new land. His walk in response to God’s call resulted in his becoming our father in the faith...Moses response to God’s call resulted in a congregation of people walking out of Egypt...the disciples response to God’s call resulted in the formation of the church.*

### **PPT #19 -#20 Maturity is not...**

So maturity is not primarily a knowledge based pursuit. Maturity happens as we respond to God’s call. If maturity is not primarily knowledge based neither is it found primarily by seeking out your human potential, as good as that is. Again Peterson comments.

*We cannot find maturity by examining ourselves in terms of ourselves; by examining ourselves against a non-relational abstraction such as “human potential”...The gospel truth from Ephesians happens in relationship--when God’s calling and our walking fit, we are growing up in Christ. God calls, we walk. That’s maturity.*

#### **PPT #21**

Pursuing maturity in Christ *is* our redemptive story. Ephesians points to God’s grace in the faith community as the place where this happens. This is the most important work you do this side of heaven.

*The most significant growing up that any person does is to grow as a Christian. All other growing up is preparation for or ancillary to this growing up. Biological, and social, mental and emotional growing is all ultimately absorbed into growing up in Christ. Or not. The human task is to become mature, not only in our bodies and emotions and minds within ourselves but also in our relationship with God and other persons.*

#### **PPT #22—gifts in hand**

Maturity is a response to God’s grace. It is primarily a gift.

*<sup>7-13</sup>But that doesn't mean you should all look and speak and act the same. Out of the generosity of Christ, each of us is given his own gift.... He handed out gifts above and below, filled heaven with his gifts, filled earth with his gifts. He handed out gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor-teacher to train Christ's followers in skilled servant work, working within Christ's body, the church, until we're all moving rhythmically and easily with each other, efficient and graceful in response to God's Son, fully mature adults, fully developed within and without, fully alive like Christ.*

Fundamental to maturing in Christ is receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. Entering the life of faith is entering a world of gifts. We understand the language of gift. We begin life as a gift. We don’t make ourselves. We don’t birth ourselves. After we are born we are immediately given gifts of food and love and clothing and shelter and nurture and

education and training. Gradually these gifts develop into the strengths and responsibilities of maturity. We respond to God's call; we receive the Spirits and multiple gifts, many in the community of faith, and we grow.

For too long gifts have been understood individually, something God confers upon us which we then use as we have aptitude and willingness. Gifts come in the context of family in the birth metaphor. In Ephesians 4 gifts come to the community. You become a gift to the community. Implicit in each gift received is an assignment. As you cooperate with God's gift in and beyond the community you become mature. Peterson comments:

*If we are to become mature, we must gradually but surely realize ourselves to be a gift from first to last. Otherwise we will misconceive our creation as self-creation and end up in some cul-de-sac or other of arrested development.*

#### **PPT #23--path**

Maturity is a complex and endless process.

*Birth is a wonderful experience for expectant parents. But growth is marked by fatigue, anxiety, panicked late night calls to the doctor, and confused decisions regarding discipline, worried conferences with teachers, puzzling over adolescent behaviours and misbehaviours. Birth is quick and easy in comparison to growth which is endless and complex.*

#### **PPT #24—t-shirt**

The road to maturity in Christ takes perseverance and patience. It is an unhurried process. It takes an intentional decision to believe and pursue this life. It involves participating in the life of a faith community as the context for personal growth. And most importantly, it is not something any of us are very good at.

In the Irish Christian communities [known as Celtic Christians] each person in the community had an *anamchara*<sup>1</sup> or soul friend. This soul friend was another member of the faith community who served as a spiritual companion, sounding board, guide and

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<sup>1</sup> *Restoring the Woven Cord, Strands of Celtic Christianity for the Church Today*, Michael Mitton; pp. 42-45.

counsellor. It was said that *a person without a soul friend was like a body without a head*. In this way the Celtic Christian communities persevered toward maturity in Christ. It is good wisdom—every one of us would benefit from a soul friend on the pilgrimage to maturity in Christ.

The reason I wrote a mentoring manual was that I believed that spiritual companionship on the road to maturity a next step for our community.

I hope you are not hearing me suggest that maturity happens when we are all a cozy community looking after ourselves. In the mentoring manual I quote Henri Nouwen and his observation on [Luke 6:12-19, NIV]:

#### **PTT -- #25**

*One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles...He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over ...who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by evil spirits were cured, and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all.*

Henri Nouwen comments:

*Jesus spent time on the mountain at night in solitary prayer. He came down in the morning and formed his community. Then in the afternoon, with his apostles, he went out and healed the sick and proclaimed the good news. I've been fascinated by the sequence of prayer at night, community in the morning and ministry in the afternoon. Notice the order—from solitude to community to ministry...these are the disciplines we are called to practice...communion with God...recognizing and gathering together in community...ministry or compassion in the world.<sup>2</sup>*

#### **PPT #26**

**Solitude, community, and ministry—this is spiritual life.** The lives of mature Christians and a mature Christian community exhibit all three. Solitude is the place we hear God's


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<sup>2</sup> *Spiritual Direction, Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith*; Henri Nouwen with Michael J. Christensen & Rebecca J Laird; pp. 110-111.

call—where we become known as we are in our weaknesses and talents and sins, yet beloved of God. Community is the place where we become God’s gift to others; in ministry and compassion beyond the community we live out the call implicit in the gift.

**PPT #27**

Today I have attempted to give you a vision for moving on to maturity in Christ. Here were the key points.

1. Maturity is not = perfection; depth of knowledge; or just seeking out your human potential 
2. **Maturity comes as our life and God’s call are axios**
  - a. as we respond to God’s call and embrace God’s gifts
  - b. We are not very good at this— helped by companions and community
  - c. Solitude, community, and ministry = spiritually mature life.
3. Maturity is a complex and endless process—just head in that direction