

The Church

Grown Up

Have you ever been in a situation, as an adult, where you thought, “I’m gonna need a grown-up in here.” I can think of several, but let me mention two. One involved one of our daughters coming home from school sick. I think Paula was actually sick in bed that day and I was in charge. Without graphic details, I stepped into the bathroom where timing and aim had been an issue, surveyed the damage and thought, “I’m gonna need a grown up.” I actually thought, “What’ll we do? We will have to close off this bathroom and put yellow crime scene tape across the door. That rooms a gonner.” But you know what I did? I realized I was the grown-up. No one else was coming. It was up to me so I cleaned up the mess.

The second story happened this summer and involved a tree frog that decided it belonged in my bathroom. I don’t know how it got there but it traumatized me, hopping unexpectedly across my path somewhere after midnight. I can deal with demons and devils but I can’t pick up a squishy frog that is unexpectedly hopping in my house. Can’t do it. Once again I thought, “I’m gonna need a grown-up in here.” I made so much noise and Paula, whom I believed to be a grown-up never stirred! I was on my own so I won’t describe how I managed to trap him (remember Marlin Perkins and Mutual of Omaha’s wild kingdom? “While Jim holds the trashcan I maneuvered behind the poisonous tree frog...”) I got rid of that one and a couple of weeks later another one was in the trashcan in the bathroom and as I tried to throw him out the back door another frog jumped in the door and attached himself underneath the kitchen table! It was like something out of Exodus! Once again, you know what I had to do? I had to be the grown-up because there was no one else coming. I was it.

I’ve called this message, Grown Up, because I believe the church, that means all of us, are going to have to realize no one else is coming. It’s up to us. We are going to have to do the work and be the church God called us to be because no one else is coming. The apostle Paul wrote, **“When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.” 1 Corinthians 13:11** If you’ve been waiting on a grown up to come fix things I’m telling you, stop looking. You’re who you’ve been waiting on. It’s up to us, the church!

Who are we? We are the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have been given a message and a commission, an assignment to carry out and God is counting on us to get the job

done. But somewhere along the line the church has abdicated our responsibility, thought we could hire professionals to do the work and we could just play and have a good time. We could be the children and leave the hard stuff to the grownups. Someone else could fix what's wrong with our community or our world, or our church. It's not our job. Several years ago I read Bill Hybels book, *Courageous Leadership*. He stated, **“I believe that only one power exists on this sorry planet that can transform the human heart. It's the power of the love of Jesus Christ, the love that conquers sin and wipes out shame and heals wounds and reconciles enemies and...ultimately changes the world, one life at a time. And what grips my heart every day is the knowledge that the radical message of that transforming love has been given to the church. That means that in a very real way the future of the world rests in the hands of local congregations like yours and mine. It's the church or it's lights out...Don't bother looking elsewhere. The church is it.”** Bill Hybels

We're it. We're the grownups. Jesus placed his love, compassion, plans, his hope for the world in the heart and hands of his church. We are the mechanism for sharing the good news with the world. That's scary and overwhelming. We're gonna need some grownups!

We, the church, have been called to obedience, to follow hard after Jesus, to take up a cross and live according to his word. It is an ancient truth that may fly in the face of some “new realities” but it is an absolute truth given to us by an eternal God. We, the church, are faced with a choice. It's time for us to recognize our calling – who we are and to what we are called. It's time for us to act like a grownup church and obey God, regardless!

It's time for the church to make a grown-up choice. Let me show you what I'm talking about with an illustration from the life of Moses found in Exodus 2. **“One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor.”** Exodus 2:11. Moses had enjoyed the pleasures and benefits of growing up in the house of the Pharaoh. He had embraced the culture and lifestyle of Egypt. He looked and dressed the part of Egyptian royalty and enjoyed the access to power, but deep inside he struggled with his identity. “Am I Egyptian or Israeli?” He tried to fit in both worlds, to straddle the fence. The conversation at parties turned to the “Hebrew problem” and how they should deal with it and Moses probably excused himself rather quickly. “Don't take sides. You don't want to sound radical and defensive. They know your past so you don't want to say anything that will offend anyone. Compromise for the sake of getting along with everyone.”

But one day, notice it says after he had grown up, he went out to watch his own people at work and realized it was time to make a grown-up choice. He couldn't let the decision slide. He had to take a side. Would he stand with God's people in their weakness and slavery or would he remain with the Egyptians and their position of power? Moses would have to choose. How am I going to live? Whose side will I take? Moses chose the Lord's side. The book of Hebrews tells us, **“By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time.” Hebrews 11:24-25**

I believe it's time for the church to grow up! It's time for the church to make a grown-up choice about who we are. If we are the only hope for this world, then we can't afford to straddle the fence in compromise. We've tried to not take sides on some things because we didn't want to offend the world we are trying to win to Christ, but in the end, we've compromised and buried the very truth we were to live and proclaim. We've chosen an easy path instead of the way of the cross. It's time for the church to grow up and make the hard choice. The world needs a grownup church to live God's way, to be a light, to speak and live the truth. No one else is coming. It's up to us to be that grownup church!

Understand, when you choose, you refuse. When you choose one thing you refuse another. Moses, when he chose to be one of God's people, by choosing, he refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. When you choose to follow Jesus, you refuse to follow the world and its standards, its values, its lifestyle. To choose to be a disciple of Jesus is to refuse to be a disciple of this world.

It's time to make a grownup choice about serving Jesus. Will I follow Him or will I go my own way? It's important. Family and friends are watching you. The choice you make affects not just you and your destiny, but the destiny of those around you, those you care about, those who are watching you. Moses' choice affected the entire nation of Israel and our spiritual destiny as well. The choice the church makes affects the destiny of this world.

The message of Christ we possess is the only hope for this world. It's time to choose but understand there is a cost involved. Grown up choices are often uncomfortable, messy, unpleasant. You'll end up way beyond your comfort zone. You'll sacrifice your comfort for others. It's what grownups do. The bible says Moses chose to endure the mistreatment of the people of God rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin and compromise for a season. Choosing to

follow Jesus and live for him may be costly, but in the long run, it is the better choice. It's a grown up choice. It is the only choice! It's time for us to choose.

It's time for the church to make a holy choice. John the beloved apostle wrote of the coming of the Lord and of our eager anticipation of his coming as the children of God. He then declared, **“Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” 1 John 3:3.** He continues by telling us Christ appeared to take away our sins and those who live in Christ, those who follow after him, don't go on sinning. Instead, we examine our hearts and we chose to do what is right. We make sure our heart and life and our choices are pure and clean and pleasing to God.

I said choosing means refusing. Choosing to be a follower of Christ means refusing to live according to the sinful desire of our flesh. We choose to live like Jesus, not like the world. It means purity in our relationships, in our conduct, in our thoughts and attitudes and actions.

Part of the reason the church in America has lost its voice and influence is because we condemn the world for its sinfulness and call the world to a standard that we ourselves have abandoned. We can't preach one thing and live another! It's easy for me to preach holiness just like it's easy for you to agree and say, “that's right, people need to get their act together and live a holy life.” What's difficult is for me and for you to live a holy life. We have to choose!

We talk about the church like it is some entity apart from us. “I remember how the church used to be. What's wrong with the church today?” We are the church! That's means we are part of what's wrong! Do you hear what I'm saying? The church isn't going to be any more holy or pure of heart than what I am willing to be – than what you are willing to be. I can't expect the world to clean up its act if the church can't and won't. I can't expect the church to live up to a standard I won't live up to. If there is hope for the world, it's because we recognize the truth of our own message and we choose to live by it! It's time to grow up and live the holy life he called us to live. We're the grownups. Jesus is counting on us. No one else is coming.

We've got this hope birthed in us by the saving grace of Jesus Christ and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit – live like it! Purify your heart. Let's take up our cross in surrender and devotion and follow Jesus. Crucifying the flesh will hurt, but it is a liberating pain. It is the pain of freedom and gain. Hear me again, I believe the only source of hope for this world is going to be found in Jesus Christ and that means the church is the delivery system of hope for this world. The only way we can bring hope to the world is if we passionately believe and live

out the truth we proclaim. It's time for the church to do more than talk about a holy life. It's time we live a holy life. All of us.

It's time for the church to make an others-centered choice. A grownup choice and a holy choice means we have to make an others-centered choice. I learned that phrase from Gayle Erwin a long time ago. He described the nature of Jesus as being others-centered. Jesus lived for others. He came to give his life for others. That's how the church must live as well. We must give ourselves to and for others. It's what grownups do.

Grownups make sacrifices for others all the time. Sacrifices for their children and grandchildren. They go to work when they don't feel like it to provide for the family. They give without demanding anything in return. They foot the bill because they are the grownups. They act on others behalf, giving, sharing, because they are focused on others.

Moses made a decision he was going to act in behalf of his Israeli brothers and sisters. He took action in defense of one of his brothers being mistreated that cost him everything. Obedience to Christ maybe bring you to a place of sacrifice in behalf of others, but that's who we are as His church. We are to be willing to lay down our life for others just as Christ laid down his life for us. It's part of what it means to be a grownup church. No longer living as children, selfish, holding on to all the toys, but freely sharing and giving to others.

We need to be asking not what can this church do for me, but what can I do for the church and for the cause of Christ and his kingdom? In America we complain about the church not meeting our needs but when is the last time you asked yourself, "Whose needs am I meeting? Where am I serving? How am I making a difference in the life and ministry of the church?" It's what grownups do and God is looking for a grownup church in Southwest Tulsa.

We aren't supposed to get all we can and hang on to it. What we have is a gift from God and we are here to share it with others, with those in need. Jesus said, **"Give to the one who asks you and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you...Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you..." Matthew 5:42, 44** Jesus said, **"You are the light of the world...let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." Matthew 5:14-16.** This is who we are in an increasingly darkening world: a light that shines brightly, not hidden under a bowl but on a stand where it can spread light to everyone.

It's time for the church to be the grownups, to stand up and proclaim the reason for our

hope. It's time for us to let our light shine, regardless of the cost. It's time to stand up and serve, to live hopefully in this generation. It's time to be the church. There is no one else to do the job, no one else to love the hurting, the broken, the dying, no one else to offer hope and bring light into the darkness. It's up to us.

A place of healing, hope, laughter and peace. That doesn't come easily. That requires grown up choices, other's centered choices. It means sacrifice and obedience and holy living. It means taking up our cross and following Jesus.

The apostle Paul figured a grownup church would look and act like this, **“As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievance you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.” Colossians 3:12-14**

It's a challenge, but it's what Jesus expects from his church. It's up to us. I believe a grown up, determined, holy living, others-centered church can change a life, a family, a community, a world.

I quoted Bill Hybels earlier. He wrote, **“...Without churches so filled with the power of God that they can't help but spill goodness and peace and love and joy into the world, depravity will win the day; evil will flood the world. But it doesn't have to be that way. Strong, growing communities of faith can turn the tide of history. They can! Don't bother looking elsewhere. The church is it.” ...Bill Hybels**

Where are the people that are going to make this church better, stronger, holier? Who is going to fix what needs to be fixed? Where are the grownups? The answer is, “We're it. We are the ones we've been waiting for.” It's up to us.

The world is waiting on a grown up church that won't just speak the truth, we will live the truth. We will step up, deny ourselves, serve Christ and live an other's centered life. We are the only hope for this messed up world. Hear Hybels again, “...What grips my heart everyday is the knowledge that the radical message of that transforming love has been given to the church. That means that in a very real way the future of the world rests in the hands of local congregations like yours and mine. It's the church or it's lights out.”

It's the church or its lights out. It's time for us to be the grownup church God needs, ready to do whatever it takes to serve the Lord and bring hope to a dying world.