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Teaching: Steve Kieklak
Senior Sunday
Message: Grow Up

Transcribed Message
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Ephesians 4:11-16

Another cool thing about it being Senior Sunday is the youth pastor gets to preach the sermon. I'm really excited about that. I always look forward to get the opportunity to come up here and especially on Senior Sunday with so many students that I'm so proud of. I have a message that's geared towards them, but it's also important for all of us.

I want to start my sermon off this morning with three quick snapshots of some people that I knew in college. Think of it kind of like a Polaroid picture –the one that you would take and it would develop really quick. The first person that I want to tell you about (these are not their real names) is a friend I had in college named Trent. Trent was a senior when I was a freshman. When I got to college, I was very insecure and I thought it was so neat that this guy who was a senior would want to waste his time with a freshman. He would hang out with me. They had a big emphasis in leadership in one of the ministries that I eventually became a part of in just investing in a freshman and getting to know them. Trent did that and I thought it was the coolest thing. I thought that I was a little bit cooler because a senior cared about me at all. Trent took his faith really seriously ... until he got consumed by the party life and found himself walking very far from Christ.

Next I want to introduce you to Brian. Brian was a missionary kid. His parents served overseas when he was little and he grew up on the mission field. This kid knew his stuff. He knew his Bible well. Every time the doors were open, every time we had any kind of event Brian was there and he was very inquisitive. He always had questions and he took the word of God very seriously ... until he was drawn in by different philosophies. He started asking questions and getting his answers from outside in the world. He started to weigh that evenly with God's Word. Eventually he threw out God's Word out altogether and today would firmly say that he's an atheist.

Last, I want to introduce you to Jacqueline. Jacqueline loved people and loved to help people. Jacqueline was a part of a mission trip I went on to Ethiopia. She was our team and she was the photographer. She took great pictures and it became sort of this running joke that she was always the photographer, always the one taking pictures. She loved people and she loved the Lord ... until she was really deceived by sexual sin and really taken away by that. Now she's walking far from where she was in the Lord.

You've probably noticed that "until" word. It's the operative word in all the stories. I'm just going to tell you guys this morning my greatest fear is that there's some "until" that is waiting for my students when they get to college. If you guys need a reason to listen to the Senior Sunday sermon, if you think this is just for the kids, this is your chance to get on the bus. There's something here for all of us. Talking about growing in Christ is relevant for everyone in this room. So for my fifth and sixth graders that are here? Man, this sermon is for you guys. You guys have got five or six years left before you leave this place. It's time for you to get equipped. If we start now, you guys are going to leave this place in great shape.

Parents, this sermon is absolutely for you because we need to train our children up in the way they should go. The church is going to come alongside that and the church is going to supplement that. But it has to be happening in the home. It's got to start in the home. Empty-nesters, this sermon is absolutely for you. We're going to talk in a minute about how God blesses the church with elders and shepherds, but God also blesses the church with those who have been walking with Him for a long time. In walking with Him for a long time, they have gained wisdom. We need you to share your wisdom with us. We need prayer warriors to pray for us. We absolutely need you and this sermon is for you.

I'll tell you, this sermon is for me too. I've got two little boys, and Lisa and I want them to grow up loving their God from a very early age. We want them to be strong in their faith and growing in Christ. This sermon is for me because I need to grow in Christ too. It's a growing. It is not something that we do once and then it's over. It's this ongoing process. So the sermon is for me too because I'll be absolutely honest with you, these "until's" – they scare me. They're the thing that keep me up at night. You could make a case and I'll confess to you that that I should probably trust God a little bit

more than I do with my students. But I also think that there is absolutely a case to be made that we have work to do and we need to prepare them for the life that comes when they leave this place.

That's what we're going to talk about today – how Christians need to grow up into Christ. We need to get trained up. We need to get discernment. We need to get more of Christ. We're going to start off by talking about getting trained up. We're going to go back to the passage that Bryce just read in Ephesians 4 starting in verse 11: "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."

When I think about this idea of getting trained up, the first thing that I would think of it is my little sister Erica. My little sister didn't pick things up quite as fast as my brother and I. We always teased her for it. We really thought we were a lot better than her because we were just naturally a little bit smarter. We got things a little bit quicker, but because of that Erica was a hard worker. She worked hard in school because she had to work hard in school. So while Ronnie and I were coasting, while we had it easy going through elementary school and middle school, Erica was working hard. She was learning as much as she could. Then we got to high school and things got a little more difficult, we couldn't coast so easily anymore. Erica was chugging on along. She was used to working hard. We got to college and she passed us all up. She did fantastic. Erica graduated with honors from the University of Arkansas nursing school. That's not an easy thing to do. Then she kept on working hard. The thing about working hard to get trained up is you don't really stop. There's not an off switch. Now she's a nurse in Northwest Arkansas and she's doing fantastic. The reason she's doing fantastic is that she worked hard to learn, to get trained up. Now for Erica, that looked like learning from nursing professors and nursing professionals. For us here in the church, it looks like learning from teachers and shepherds and pastors.

The first thing that we see in our text this morning is the reason that God gave us pastors, the reason that God gave us elders. It wasn't for them to do all of the ministry and do all the work while everyone else watches. No, He gave us pastors to equip the

saints for the work of ministry. Carlon doesn't get to have all the fun. We get to get in on it with him. That's the whole reason that he's here. This passage lists off the different offices. It lists off prophets and teachers and shepherds. It shows us how God gifted different people in different ways to pass on those gifts to the body. In a lot of ways, this is the Great Commission. This is Matthew 28: Go and make disciples and teach them to obey everything that God commanded. That's what the pastors do. They teach us to obey.

Then, in that learning process, the next step is obedience. It's doing. I want to encourage you guys this morning to take advantage of that. Take advantage of that opportunity. Get equipped. Equipped is just a fancy word. It's pastor jargon for learn and get trained. Learn. Learn your Bible. Understand your Bible. Understand what it means. Understand how to apply your Bible. Don't use "I don't know how" as an excuse to not do something. I think that the big thing that we see here is that we don't need to use that as an excuse. If you don't know how, then figure out who does know how and then get trained up. Learn how you're gifted and then go use those gifts to bless others. Get in the game. Don't let Carlon and Ron have all the fun. Many of you guys are doing this great. Many of you are using your gifts to minister to others. For the rest of you, I would just encourage you this morning to go ahead and get started.

Paul gives us the reason that we're doing this too. He says that we're doing it for the building up of the body of Christ. It's really important that we see that this is not just so that you can be the best Christian that you can be. It's not just about us. We will absolutely benefit from it. We'll be much better for knowing our Bibles better and knowing how to use it to be a blessing to others. But it's not just about us. It's to benefit the body of Christ, the faith family, the church.

Then as we bless the church, as the church grows up, we're working toward a specific direction. We're working toward maturity. In the church, there is nothing cool or attractive about the spiritual man-child. Prolonged spiritual adolescence is not a pretty sight and is not something that we look at and say I want to be doing that forever. I want to be in in children's church forever. That is not something anyone says. In verse 14 we're going to see what that is. We'll see why we don't want to stick around in childhood because we'll see that leaves us very vulnerable. Instead, we're learning to use our

spiritual gifts so that we can reach mature manhood, mature womanhood, who we are in Christ. We don't want to be like the hearer of the Word who deceives himself. We don't want to be like the guy who built his house on the sand and it got blown away. We don't want to be in children's church forever. We want to grow up in to Christ. In order to do that we have to be trained up.

The next thing you need is to get discernment. I'm going to read verse 14 again. it says: "So that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes." A couple of weeks ago, Ron put this really well when he preached on Proverbs 1. Ron said that young Christians are being devoured by naiveté. I think that this is illustrated really well in a place that a lot of us are familiar with and some will be familiar with it soon.

Graduates, maybe you've already received this. If you haven't yet, you'll probably at some point in the process of graduating as a gift receive the book Oh, The Places You'll Go by Dr. Seuss. It's a really good book. It's got really great pictures. Most of all, it is the picture of the incredible potential you've got and all the awesome things that you guys are going to be able to do. I think Dr. Seuss said something that really reminds me of this passage so I'm going to read this excerpt. "Oh, the places you'll go. There is fun to be done. There are points to be scored. There are games to be won. And the magical things you can do with that ball will make you the winningest winner of all. Fame. You'll be famous as famous can be with the whole wide world watching you win on TV. Except when they don't. Because sometimes they won't. I'm afraid that sometimes you'll play lonely games too. Games you can't win as you play against you. All alone whether you like it or not. Alone will be something you'll be quite a lot. And when you're alone, there's a very good chance you'll meet things that scare you right out of your pants. There are some down the road between hither and yon that can scare you so much you won't want to go on. But on you will go though the weather be foul. On you will go though your enemies prowl. On you will go though the hacking cracks howl. Onward through many a frightening creek though your arms may get sore and your sneakers may leak."

I think the good doctor gets an awful lot right here. I think it's absolutely true that sometimes the world is going to cheer us on for what we're going to do and that's going

to feel great. We're going to love it. And sometimes the world is going to hate us because of Who we follow. Jesus said that was going to be the case, but somehow we're still surprised by that. Somehow we still feel like that's wrong, that everyone should be cheering for us and that is just not so. When they are against us, we can feel isolated and we can feel alone. When we feel alone, I think is when we are the most vulnerable to attack. Paul talks about those attacks in verse 14. He talks about being tossed to and fro in the waves and carried about. He talks about being carried around by three different things. I want to break those down for us really quick.

The first one is the wind of doctrine. Just as Dr. Seuss talked about an enemy prowling, Peter talks about that too. He says that the devil is our enemy and he prowls like a lion looking for someone to devour. From day one, Satan's MO has been wind of doctrine. From the very beginning in the garden, what Satan did was to take God's Word and twist it and then ask did God really say that? This is how our enemy works. He is cunning. He is subtle. He is looking for someone to devour. This is how my friend Jacqueline, mentioned in the beginning, was swept away by the wind of doctrine. It's not just Satan. It's his cronies too. I think that false teachers camp out in this area. there's a lot of stuff out there today that claims to be Christian, but I think on closer inspection we look at some of the sheep. They've got some really sharp teeth. They've got some really big claws and unfortunately they also have a very large following. I think that false teachers are great at marketing and I doubt that business has ever been better for them that but it is right now in the 21st century. So what we need is discernment. Discernment to see these false Gospels for what they are, which is no gospel at all.

Next Paul talks about human cunning, which is another way that we can be preyed upon. This is the philosophies of the day. They change a little bit over time, but if you really look at the heart of what's being said, a lot of it stays the same. A lot of it hasn't really changed. This is what my friend Brian was swept away by. What we need as Christians is we need to reach a measure of maturity that when it comes time to enroll for our general education and we take that philosophy 101 class, the first time we sit down in a lecture hall we're not instantly swept away. In order for that to happen, we're going to need discernment. We need help to be able to see what is helpful and valuable and what is not what is empty.

The third thing that Paul talks about is craftiness and deceitful schemes. There are these schemes and these plans for these deceitful structures. These structures have a very attractive façade. They look really good from the outside. They've got bright lights and they look great. But when you step inside the door, they're empty. It's a trap of emptiness. This is what my friend Trent was carried off by the allure of the party life. In Proverbs 5 it says that the forbidden woman's lips drip honey and her words are smooth, but her feet go down to death and she does not ponder the path of life. I think that of these three, this might be the one that's most prevalent in our society today. I think that it's everywhere. This is the siren's call or the hacking cracks howl. This is the voices telling you that you need to buy this. You need to look at this. You need to look like this. You need to pay attention to these people. There are always voices saying all the things that we need. What we actually need is discernment to know what is good and life-giving and what is trying to drag us down to death.

I also want you to notice something in verse 14. Notice that it's written in the passive voice. It says that we don't want to be children tossed to and fro by the waves. The children there are in the passive voice. They're being acted upon by an outside force. They're not tossing themselves to and fro. They're being tossed. I think that this morning, God's Word is calling us to action. It is calling us to be active, to get discernment, to grow in Christ. Don't be a child anymore. Children get thrown around. Grow up and stand tall in your faith.

Finally, I think we need to get more of Christ. I'll read those last two verses for us again. "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." We're not growing up in some abstract way. I'm not just talking about growing up socially. I'm talking about growing up into Christ.

The three main points of our sermon really build on each other. We start with getting trained up. As we get to know our Bibles better, that can give us discernment and so will the Holy Spirit. As we gain that discernment, we're going to get more of Christ and not just filling our head with stuff. We're getting more of Christ. This is something that all of us need. We all need less of us and we need more of Christ. I'll tell

you that I have preached from this very pulpit about being slow to speak and slow to anger and I have failed at that since I preached it here. There've been times where I've gotten upset and I've gone off and afterwards I realized this is James 1. so I need more Christ and so do you.

We see that as we grow in the truth we're also going to be called to speak the truth. We have this truth that the whole world needs. Everybody needs it and we have it. As we get trained up, as we learn more of this truth, as we're deployed to minister, we proclaim this truth. But we do it with gentleness and love. This isn't something something that we beat people over the head with. We're going to follow the example of Jesus. He was the Lamb of God and His ministry was marked by compassion, love and patience.

Paul finishes up in verse 18 with his body analogy. He talks about how when everything is working, when every joint is equipped, that's when the fun starts. Paul says that when every joint is equipped, then the body builds itself up in love. I always found this part of the passage a little bit confusing. I understood the different parts of the body doing the different things. I understood that Christ is the head of the church, but I never quite understood this last part of it. Then recently I got to see a picture of it that really helped me understand it better. A few weeks ago, a group of us got to go to a conference in Dallas. We went to Watermark Church and the whole point of the conference was for them to show us how their church works and what they do and what works well for them and what has been effective. The conference was really encouraging. It was really neat to see this church. The church is doing great. The thing that was the most impressive about their church is they have a huge staff but the whole staff is on the same page. They're all very well trained and then they train their volunteers very well. Then you get to see the effect of that and the effect is awesome. They have all the stories of life being changed in Dallas and people coming to Christ. When we came back from the conference, a lot of us were really excited. We were excited because we wanted to see what we saw there that could help us here at Covenant. I love Covenant Community Church. I would love to see where we can work on getting all of our parts working together. What will it look like for Covenant to have all the parts working properly so that we are just a disciple-making factory? What do we

have to do to get every joint equipped so that Covenant Community Church can push back the darkness in Yukon, Oklahoma and shine the light of Christ on our community? In this picture of Watermark, if you're having trouble figuring out what this has to do with getting more Christ, we can go back to when verse 15 turns into verse 16 and it talks about He who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body. Christ is the source of all of this happening so that's why we need more Christ, so we can be fully equipped, so that we can reach this point where we've grown up into Christ.

When we get to college or the workplace, or when we get to a family reunion where people are asking hard questions about our faith and what we believe and who we are, we can stand firm. We can say my life is defined by the fact that I've been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who lives but Christ lives in me. That's who I am.

I want to finish off our sermon with three more quick snapshots of people that I knew in college. The first one is Brice. When Brice got to college, he was kind of struggling. He was kind of shy and a lot of his friends in college were just his friends from high school. He was really having trouble adjusting ... until he got plugged in at a parachurch ministry and started getting disciplined. He started getting more excited about his faith and sharing it. Today he's married and he just got approved to enter the mission field. We're really excited for Brice and what God's going to do with him these next few years.

Next I want to introduce you to Ben. Ben was a lazy kid from a go-getter family. Everyone was little bit worried about Ben because all the other kids left the nest and took off and he didn't. people really worried about him when he got to college ... until he got involved in his church. He got disciplined and he was challenged to live out his faith. Ben rose to that challenge. It was awesome to see. Today Ben is doing fantastic. He lives in Houston. His wife is on staff at the church and he helps her in ministry. He is discipling a guy right now that sounds a whole lot like a younger Ben. I am so proud of him and so excited to see what he's doing.

Finally, I want to introduce you to Lisa. Lisa was a quiet little band nerd who grew up in the church but was far from Christ when she got to college ... until God used a woman named Kristin in her life. Kristin loved her and disciplined her. Then Lisa was a part of an internship at her church that equipped her and trained her up. Now the Lord

has called her from the beautiful hills and trees of Arkansas to the flat plains of Oklahoma where she is raising up these two beautiful little boys. She's doing the hard work of taking care of the local youth pastor. If you ask Lisa what her favorite thing is about being here, about living in Oklahoma, one of the first things she'll tell you is her small group girls. You heard in the video, and I thought it was so neat to hear, but so many people thanked Erin and thanked Cody and their small group leaders who poured in to them for years. Lisa loves pouring into her small group girls. She loves spending time with them. She is so proud of them. She talks about them all the time. What she hopes for her small group girls is the same thing that I hope for all of our seniors graduating today and in all the years to come.

When we're sharing your stories in a few years, that we're sharing stories of you guys just thriving and growing in Christ and doing all kinds of incredible things all over the state and all over the world, we hope that we don't have to tell stories of you guys hitting campus and being immediately carried off but instead that you're standing strong, that you guys are standing together in a church and that you guys are growing in every way into Christ. Now we need to acknowledge that sadly, and it breaks my heart to even have to say this, but that might not be the case. It might be that that in a couple of years you find yourself far from where you are right now. You might find yourself tossed to and fro in the waves and really just trying to get up for breath. What I would say is that there's still hope. There is always hope. That would put you in the same boat as my friends that I mentioned at the top of the sermon. It's sad when I have to talk about them, but I also say that there's still hope for them because they're still alive. As long as you're alive, there's hope because there's grace. There was a time where there was no hope for any of us ... until God showed his love for us. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Because of that truth, because Christ died and paid for all of our sins, you can't get far enough away from God that you can't come back. You can always come back. And when you do, the Father is going to run to greet you. He is going to embrace you and welcome you back. Christ is going to welcome you back. His bride, the church, is also going to take you back.

Let's pray. Father God, I thank You for these seniors. I thank You for all that You've already accomplished in their lives and thank You for how much they've grown

and how much they've learned. Lord, I pray that You will be with them in this next step of their life. I pray that You will be with Your church. Lord, I pray that You would help us to rally around our young people, rally around our parents, rally around everyone in our church and that we would build each other up in love. Lord, I pray that You would be glorified in this place, that You would help us to be equipped so that we will no longer be children but that we would grow up in Christ. I pray these things in His beautiful name, amen.