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Honestly: Getting Real About Jesus and Our Messy Lives
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MESSAGE #1 - Walking the Walk - Ephesians 4-5

TEACHER'S NOTES:

I love expository preaching which means going verse by verse through a passage of Scripture. Every preaching style has some downsides. One of the downsides of expository preaching is that we can miss the big picture of a longer section than you can preach in one message.

So in this teaching, I wanted to focus on the “walks” of Ephesians 4 and 5. I also use this idea of walking in *Honestly* as it relates to both jazz music (i.e. the walking bass line) and walking through our messy lives.

- The six walks expressed in this message could easily make a series on it's own - Each message focusing on one of the six walks.
- Given your context, you can see how easily you can adapt this type of message to suit many different focus groups.
- Always stay alert to common themes that run through a larger section of Scripture and be creative in seeking to package it in a way that helps bring the message to life.

OUTLINE

1. Walk in Humility
2. Walk in Uniqueness
3. Walk in Love
4. Walk in Light
5. Walk in Wisdom
6. Walk in the Spirit

Introduction

There are two themes that are running through my book “*Honestly*” - the book of Ephesians that the apostle Paul wrote to the Church in Ephesus, and then also, the reality of my love of music. As I came to Ephesians 4-5, I wanted to talk about the six different walks set out in those chapters.

When I started thinking about the idea of walking, my brain automatically goes to when I first picked up an upright bass. I was about 19 years old. I remember getting this big instrument and I thought it will be cool to play it. I'm like, "I need to learn how to play this instrument." I wanted to hear some people who could play the upright bass really well and somebody said, "You need to go buy some jazz albums", and I bought John Coltrane's, "A Love Supreme" and Miles Davis', "Kind of Blue". I remember I put on the first album and my mind was completely blown.

I heard that bass player walking the bass line and I had to learn how to do that. Over time, I started to learn that walking a bass line is a job where the bass has to take the qualities of the chords and the song and to bridge it to the rhythm. There's a right way to do that. In a lot of ways, our lives as Christians are the same thing. We need to learn how to walk through a life that has all these different qualities and really, only Jesus teaches us how to walk it the right way. In Hebrew, the word for walk is actually the word "derech," which literally means path or way and each one of us is on the way.

All of Paul's letters were written because Paul started a church but in each one of those churches, there were issues. There were problems like the church that I get to be a part of, the church that you get to be a part of. No church is perfect. Jesus is perfect but churches are messy.

One of the themes of my book "Honestly" is that life is messy but Jesus is real. In all of Paul's letters and definitely the Book of Ephesians, Paul is writing about that fact. In this local congregation - in the middle of the Roman Empire - there are issues and problems and Paul is trying to get at those issues. He sets out quite beautifully from Ephesians chapter 4 and 5 six different ways that we should walk.

1. Walk In Humility

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ²with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, ³endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:1-3 NKJV).

Now, walking through this messy life that you're having, that I'm having, we need to learn how to walk in humility. Look what it says, "I beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you are called with all lowliness and gentleness in long suffering." Paul is exhorting the church in Ephesus, that as we are walking through our messy lives, we need to learn how to walk in humility with lowliness. That's one of the biggest problems isn't it? That part of the messiness of life is our pride, the pride of people. Part of the conflicts that we experience almost always comes back down to lack of humility. I think that's why Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit."

Humility is essential for walking through this life. I love the fact that Paul exhorts this church to walk in lowliness of mind. I want you to be long suffering and gentle with

one another. Keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. It's essential for us walking through our messy lives to say, "Lord, I want to be humble as you are." Isn't that what Jesus said?

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30 NKJV).

Jesus is humble and He invites us as we move through life to walk with humility. This is essential to the life of a Christian.

2. Walk in Uniqueness

From there, if we're to move to Ephesians chapter 4 verse 17, this is what the apostle Paul says:

This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ (Ephesians 4:17-20 NKJV).

Not only are we supposed to walk in humility, but in these verses we learn that we're supposed to walk in uniqueness. Each one of us is called to be unique. Unique from the world and unique from each other. For the church in Ephesus, they were struggling with trying to be too much like the world and that's why the apostle said, "Listen, I want you to not walk like the rest of the gentiles. I want you to be different. I want you to be unique."

Each one of us struggles to be unique from the world so that we may look like the people of God. Being unique is essential to walking the bass line properly through our messy lives. How are you and I being unique in the situations in which we find ourselves? In each area of our life, there's a way that the world works but then there's the way of Jesus that He invites us to walk differently in - to walk uniquely. We need to be unique from the culture that we live in but we're also called to be unique from each other.

I get that of course from Ephesians chapter 2:

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10 NKJV).

What that means is that each individual member of the body of Christ is actually created uniquely for a unique work that God foreordained that we would walk in. Are you walking uniquely today - distinct from the world, unique from the world, and also, being okay to be unique from other people? How often are the struggles that we experience because maybe because we fixate on another follower of Jesus? God's given them a unique calling compared to ours and we have a tendency to judge ourselves by them or other people.

Instead, we should be saying, "You know, God's created me uniquely. He's given me a unique set of gifts and talents. I am going to let the Lord use those talents in my life."

So, one of the ways that we're supposed to walk is we're supposed to walk in uniqueness. Each one of us unique from the world and also unique from one another.

3. Walk in Love

Now, if we move to Ephesians chapter 5.

Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma (Ephesians 5:1-2 NKJV).

My friends, we need to walk in love. The overarching characteristic of the Christian life is love just like Jesus and as imitators of God. Think about that. First he says I want you to be imitators of God as children. Don't you love that? Because when you see children, they always end up like their parents. Sometimes they're a lot like one or the other parent, sometimes they're a conglomeration of both. Each child ends up being in some ways a chip off the old block. They're just like their parents.

I know as I've gotten older and become a parent, I muse back and remember growing up saying, "I'm never going to be like my dad." Yet, sure enough I'll say something think "Wow, I sound just like my dad!" That's because children are being socialized by their parents. As God is our father now, God wants us to be imitators of Him, and when we're imitators of God, we walk in love and we become just like Jesus. All through the Gospels, we learn that we are supposed to be walking in love - that each one of us are supposed to experience God's love and then pass it along.

Think about what Jesus said in John 15:12-13:

This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends (NKJV).

And again in:

By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35 NKJV).

We are to be known by our love and we know that we're the disciples of Jesus by our love for one another.

One of the hardest things to do in the messy lives that we're living is to walk in love. Oftentimes the messiness of life hurts and we feel it. And although we experience the pain of life, God doesn't want us to return evil for evil. He wants us to return good for evil. Not just forgiving evil but He wants us to be proactively loving. That's exactly the message of Jesus. When the apostle Paul experienced the love of Christ on the Damascus road it changed his life. He finally realized that God had been so gracious to him that he had to now go out and share Jesus and God's love with other people.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to walk in love each and every day. We need to be asking ourselves, "How are we proactively loving people?" And we need to love people the way we have been loved by Jesus – sacrificially. God loved us and he gave himself for us an offering and a sacrifice. Our love needs to do the same.

Now, don't get me wrong, that's not an easy thing. That's really hard isn't it? To love somebody else by sacrificing ourselves. But that's exactly what Jesus has done for us and by the power of the Holy Spirit, God wants to cultivate that same sacrificial love in our hearts so that we may live it out.

One of the ways that we are to walk beautifully through this life is to walk in love. We've already seen, we walk in humility, we walk in uniqueness, we walk in love.

4. Walk in Light

Our next walk is found in Ephesians 5:8-9:

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth) (NKJV).

You and I are supposed to walk in light. That's a beautiful thing because all through the Bible, Jesus reminds us that He is the light of the world and then He tells His disciples that we are the light of the world. Now, it's important, when you talk about walking in light to realize that we do not have to self generate the light. Too many of us try that. We say, "I'm going to be light. This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine." But really, God did not create us to be the generators of light. God created us to be the reflectors of light. You see that in creation. In Genesis 1 and 2 God created the greater light to rule by day and then the lesser light to rule by night. The greater light is the sun and it rules by day. The moon is the lesser light, which rules by night. The moon's job is to reflect the light of the sun.

God placed in creation exactly the perfect picture for you and I to realize that the generator of light is the S-O-N, Jesus. He is the light of the world. As His followers, we are meant to reflect His light into the world. God desires for us to walk in His light.

When we're walking in Jesus, when we're walking in the spirit, when we're not fulfilling the lust of the flesh, then God's light can enter the world through us.

Think about that for a second. In the messiness of your life and in the messiness of my life, what does it look like for us to be the vehicle for God's light to move into the world? I love this because it says, "but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light" and then says, "for the fruit of the spirit is in all goodness, righteousness and truth." The way we know that we're walking in light is if our presence and our walk with Jesus in the world, produces those things. Does it produce goodness? That would be all the things that pertain to what is good. Does it produce righteousness? That word for righteousness literally means all the things that pertain to what is right or just. And, finally, does it produce truth? Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the light."

We are called to walk in light. In 1 John 1:5, it says, "God is light and in Him there's no darkness at all."

Jesus said, "I'm the light of the world", John 8:12.

In that beautiful Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5, Jesus says, "You are the light of the world."

When you consider this concept, it is mind blowing. We get to walk in light in the midst of a messy world. We get to be a group of people who reflect the light of God into strange and uncomfortable circumstances in the name of Jesus. And that's just one of the ways that we are called to walk through this world.

5. Walk in Wisdom

Another way is in Ephesians 5:15-16:

See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil (NKJV).

Another way that we are meant to walk is in wisdom. I love how Paul describes it – "see that you walk circumspectly." That word literally means carefully. Now, it's important to make sure we put out there how the Bible defines wisdom because it is really different from the world's definition of wisdom. Scripture says in Proverbs 9:10 and Psalm 111:10 that "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

This is important because oftentimes people will say, "Oh, I'm wise because I've gotten a lot of education" or "I'm wise because I have all this experience." Yet, true Biblical wisdom begins with fearing the Lord. Why should we fear the Lord the beginning of wisdom? First, because we fear God's authority. Each person gives account for their life before the Lord. We are all held accountable for our lives and He is the judge of all the Earth.

I think this is a beautiful reality because we are naturally designed to fear authority. The reason I know this is because have you ever been driving down the road and all of a sudden you look in the rear view mirror and there's a black and white car with lights on top? Everybody has the same response. You hit your brake, you put your hands at 10 and 2 and you keep looking back. Why? Because that police officer has the authority to be able to pull you over and issue you a citation. The natural response to that authority is a type of fear even if you're not doing anything wrong. How much more so the authority of the true and living God in whom we live and move and have our being?

It's important for us that the fear of the Lord includes this fear of His authority but we should also fear breaking God's heart. That's a relational type of fear. As a married man I always say, "I should fear breaking my bride's heart." I always tell my kids, "Don't ever make your mama cry." Why? I want them to develop a love of their mom that they would fear hurting her. The same is true in our relationship with God. We need to love Him to the point that we fear breaking His heart.

So Biblical wisdom is rooted in our relationship with God. It informs us to fear God because of His authority and His position as the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. But it also sensitizes us to fear breaking God's heart because we love God and God loves us. The kind of wisdom we are to walk in is based on a relationship.

The Apostle Paul reminds us that as we walk wisely, we also need to walk carefully through this life. If you're walking into your house with the lights off, you still know where everything is. You have a tendency to already have a framework and so you can walk completely free even without light because you know where everything is. But if you are walking through a minefield that you've never been through before, knowing that at any point you could step on something that could end your life, you walk significantly different.

That's the idea of walking in wisdom. We realize that we need to be careful in this world. We don't want to be foolish but, rather we want to be wise. We need to redeem the time because the days are evil.

6. Walk in the Spirit

Then finally, the sixth way to walk is found in Ephesians chapter 5:18-21:

And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God (NKJV).

All through Paul's letters, all through the Bible, there is this juxtaposition between walking in the spirit and walking in the flesh, walking in the Lord and walking in rebellion against God. Paul uses a very vivid picture here. In explaining this idea of do not be drunk with wine in which there is dissipation or excess but be filled with the spirit, he employs a comparison to being under the influence of alcohol.

If you've ever been around somebody who is under the influence of alcohol, the influence of that foreign substance impedes their judgment. If somebody were to get pulled over under the influence of alcohol, they get the citation of "driving under the influence" because that exterior influence now changes their ability to cope with life.

It's actually the perfect picture for what it means to be walking in the spirit. Because the Holy Spirit (not as an outside influence but when you put your faith and trust in Jesus as an internal influence) now influences our behavior. He influences how we walk. He influences how we live at each point of our lives. In the same way that somebody could be drunk with alcohol and that is a negative influence, the power, the ministry, and the relationship that we get to have with the Holy Spirit now becomes an influence on our lives positively. We should be able to get a citation for being under the influence of the Holy Spirit because people would know that we are being influenced by something that changes our ability to cope with life.

God has given each one of us who is in Christ His spirit that we would walk in the spirit. When we are walking in the spirit and under the influence of the Holy Spirit, Paul says that it will influence how we speak – "speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." The influence of the Spirit should be in our mouths and in our speech. Not only that, His influence should be in the way that we praise – "singing and making melody in our hearts to the Lord." His influence should be in the way we give thanks to God – "giving of thanks always to God." Also, we see in these verses that the influence of the Holy Spirit in our life can be seen by the way that we submit to one another which, again, ties us back to where we began, with this idea of humility. We submit to one another in the love of Christ because God has blessed us with a humble heart.

Conclusion

Now think about this, If you're learning how to play jazz, if you're learning how to walk a bass line, there's all this things you need to know in order to get it right, in order to do it well, in order to be good at it. God's design in our messy lives is that we learn how to live well in this world. The parameters for how to walk is that we walk in humility, we walk in uniqueness, we walk in love, we walk in light, we walk in wisdom, and we walk in the Spirit.

MESSAGE #2 - Grace and Peace - Ephesians 1:1-14

TEACHER'S NOTES:

In the first section of my book *Honestly*, I wanted to set the stage that although life is messy, Jesus is real. And even though we believe in God, our understanding of God is also a bit messy. Ephesians 1:1-14 is a great text to get at that.

- I love Expository preaching so walking through a long passage of Scripture is awesome.
- The grace and peace theme of all of Paul's letters becomes an important part of *Honestly*
- The framing of the Persons of the Trinity is a sweet packaging.
- No message fully explains every aspect of a text so you can pick and choose your material given your desired message length, depth and focus.

OUTLINE

1. The remedy for the mess is grace and peace
2. Although messy, God is to be praised
3. The Father adopts in eternity past
4. The Son redeems in history past
5. The Spirit seals in the present

Introduction

Our lives are messy. They're really messy. Sometimes I feel like I'm the captain of Team Life is Messy. All through my life, at each term, both before I came to know Jesus and even still, my life's full of stuff that you're just like, "I can't believe this is my life." Whether it was my mother getting sick when I was in college or the things I face now as a parent, raising children – it is all extraordinarily messy. If we're not careful, sometimes the mess can overwhelm us.

The good news is that there's another reality. Not only is life this messy, but Jesus is real. He's the Lord of the mess. Jesus wants to meet you and meet me at the street level of our mess, everywhere that we are, no matter if it goes the way we think it should go or goes completely opposite of where we thought it would go. Jesus is right there with us at street level, meeting us there. You can see this all through the Scriptures.

I love the book of Ephesians. In fact, I wrote my book, *Honestly*, based around the book of Ephesians, because the church in Ephesus, like our churches today - like our lives - was full of messiness. From the minute Paul planted the church in Ephesus in Acts 19, it

began. There was all this stuff going on. By the time the Apostle Paul is arrested and taken to Rome, he meets with the Ephesian elders in Acts 20 and says:

For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves (Acts 20:29-30 NKJV).

And when Jesus speaks to the church of Ephesus in the book of Revelation, Chapter 2, He tells them:

Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. ⁵ Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent (Revelation 2:4-5 NKJV).

The church in Ephesus, like every church, was messy. Now, you might say, "Well, why is it messy?" Well, because people are involved. People like you, people like me, people who don't have everything all together. The beauty of that is - in the midst of our messes, God is real. That's the main message of *Honestly*. It is to convey the hope for people like you, like me, who have messy lives. My goal – as I believe was the goal of the Apostle Paul - is to help people see that there is a God over the mess.

I think that may be why Paul's letter to the Ephesians in its introduction starts the way it does:

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:1-2 NKJV).

1. The Remedy for the Mess Is Grace and Peace

These two words – grace and peace - they're like twins in Paul's letter. He almost always says, "Grace and peace to you." The reality is that grace and peace are the remedy for the mess of our lives. That word, "grace" in the Greek is the word "charis," which literally means "to find favor." Often the writers of Scripture, inspired by the Holy Spirit, would take existing words and infuse them with new meaning.

The idea of grace goes there. We realize that it's God's unmerited, unearned, undeserved favor. I like to say, if you take that word "grace," **G-R-A-C-E**, the word is an acronym for: **G**od's **R**iches **A**t **C**hrist's **E**xpense. I love that definition of grace because it puts Jesus at the center. It's all of God's blessings that come at the expense of the finished work of Christ. See, the cross and the empty tomb of Jesus isn't just what we believe in and our sins are forgiven. It tells us the whole story about life. It shows us who we are meant to be and how we are meant to walk.

It's important to realize that grace always comes before peace. God has blessed us with His grace. He's bestowed His grace upon us, and God has given you and me grace in the mess, that we realize that no matter what our messy lives look like, if we are in Jesus, there is grace for us. God has been good to us. His blessings and His favor are upon us because of Jesus. That changes and colors the mess of our lives and gives us quite a different perspective.

I look at my life in a different way because I understand God's grace in it. I realize that God loves me not because I'm lovable, but because God is full of love. I get things wrong all the time, but I don't have to condemn myself because the cross teaches me that by the grace of God, Jesus took the punishment that I deserved and gave me His righteousness and His love. That's the Gospel.

Grace is part of the remedy of the mess because God has blessed us in Jesus. We need to keep that right in front of us, but we also need to see that God's grace leads us to peace. It says, "Grace to you and peace." Grace comes first, and once we understand God's grace as the remedy for the mess, then we start to experience the peace of God.

All through our Bibles, it's important to remember that first we are at peace with God relationally, and then God gives us His own peace. It says that because of the finished work of the cross, although we were at enmity with God, now we've been made at peace with Him because of the cross. That signifies that there has been a cessation of hostilities. Once God has made us His own He also, now wants to give us His peace which surpasses all understanding. This is so absolutely important, that in the midst of our messy lives, as we experience and understand God's grace, then all of a sudden, now God makes us at peace with Him through the finished work of the cross, and God gives us a supernatural peace that guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus in the mess.

It reminds me of Jesus when the disciples were going on the Sea of Galilee and a storm came up. In the midst of that storm, Jesus is sleeping in the boat. The storm is raging, but Jesus is at peace. Remember, the disciples wake him up. They're so freaked out. They're like, "Man, Lord, don't you care that we're perishing?" What happens? Jesus just stands on up and he says, "Peace. Be still," and all the wind and the waves stop. In the midst of so much storm and so many issues, Jesus was at peace and He spoke a simple word and everything calmed down.

2. Although Messy, God is to be Praised

Grace and peace are the remedy for our mess. Okay, that's the remedy, but why? Well, look at what it says in Ephesians 1:3 continuing on here:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, ⁴just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in

love,⁵ having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, ⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

⁷ In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace ⁸ which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, ⁹ having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, ¹⁰ that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. ¹¹ In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, ¹² that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. ¹³ In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory (Ephesians 1:3-14 NKJV).

Now, I read that long passage, Ephesians 1:3-14 in a clip because it's actually a long run-on sentence in the Greek. The reason grace and peace are the remedy for the mess of our lives is because there is a God who is worthy of praise.

Now, let's get this out of the way. Part of the messiness of life is understanding the infinite, all-knowing creator and sustainer God through finite minds like yours and mine. Nobody has all of who God is completely dialed in on the human level, except for Jesus who is God in flesh. For the rest of us, this idea of who God is presents a challenge. With each passing day, we're learning more and more about who God. It's the same thing in our human relationships. No matter how well you know somebody, each and every day, you learn new things about them. You didn't realize that they'd like that, or they didn't like that. I know couples who've been married for 50, 60 years. My grandparents have been married for over 60 years. They're still learning new things about each other, because we can't completely understand someone in totality no matter how long we know them. How much more so for the God who created us and sustains us; the God who is infinite, and we are finite?

However, just because we can't know everything about God does not mean that we do not know anything about God. God has given us His general revelation in the things that were created, the world around us, and He's given us specific revelation in His word. The doctrine of the Trinity - that God exists eternally, one God in three persons (hence the word "trinity," which never exists in your Bible, but the concept is there) is one of those things that we can hardly get our head around. That's why they came up with the word. But Ephesians 1:3-14 is a powerful exposition of this concept - God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

I want you to notice that it says, "Blessed be," and then it goes on with the concept of the trinity. This teaches us that in the midst of not understanding everything, we can still

praise what we do understand. So in the messiness of our life, we may not understand what is going on, but God is still to be praised. We praise God for being God in the midst of our mess. Psalm 103 says: "Bless the Lord, oh my soul, and all that is within me, bless or worship His Holy name."

We are called to praise the God of the mess. It's beautiful, because we see in these following verses, we see about the Father, we see about the Son, and we see about the Holy Spirit. We learn about God the Father in verses 3 to 6. We learn about God the Son in verses 7 to 12, and we learn about God the Holy Spirit in verses 13 and 14. One long run-on sentence inspired by the Holy Spirit in the Greek teaches us very important things and creates a concept that we can never fully understand but still praise God for who He is in it.

3. The Father Adopts in Eternity Past

See, grace and peace and worship in the midst of the mess of your life are powerful because first we learn that God the Father adopts us in eternity past. We see this in these verses, like when it says:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, ⁶to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved (Ephesians 2:3-6 NKJV).

God the Father adopts us in eternity past. Before the foundations of the world, God the Father has chosen, to the praise of His glorious grace, to choose us to be his kids. Now, that idea of adoption is powerful. As a parent, when a husband and a wife, a man and a woman, come together in the blessings of marriage, the fruit of that is often a child. You don't get to choose that child, he or she just shows up based on your DNA and the purposes of God. It's another whole thing to be adopted. It's a different game altogether for someone to come and say, "No, I'm going to choose you to be my own."

What's amazing about God's adoption of us as His children is the fact that God adopted us with full disclosure. I love that. Before the foundations of the world, the Alpha and the Omega, the true and living God knew everything about us, knew all of our strengths and our weaknesses. He knows all of our failings. All of the mistakes you made, all the messes that we've created, all the messes that we've added to, all the messes that we've left unclean - all these things. He knew them, and he chose us anyway. He did this, it says, before the foundation of the world. That's a powerful reality: God the Father adopting you and I as His kids. Doesn't that change the way you look at the mess of your life? To realize, "Yeah. This is a mess. It's a total mess. It is a train wreck. But, before the foundations of the world, God the Father chose me to be His child." He

has invited me to be a part of His family. He had a place setting at the family table that had my and your name on it. That's a powerful reality. We have the Father. Obviously, these verses are pregnant with meaning. So much in there, so much for us to glean out of it. God the Father adopts us in eternity past.

4. The Son Redeems in History Past

Now, as you move on and you start looking at God the Son, look what it says about Jesus in verses 7-12:

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

Now the focus moves to God the Son, and we learn that God the Son, redeems us in history past. The focus of the finished work of Jesus is the redemption. That literally means to buy back out of slavery. This is the work of the cross and the empty tomb, where in history past, about 2000 years ago, on a hill in Jerusalem, Jesus died and He came out of that tomb three days later. In history past, God the Son came to redeem those of us who are His. That's a powerful reality. That is why, no matter what the mess of your life looks like, we always have to say, "But God... But what Jesus has done..." When you look at the mess of your life, you realize that at the cross, Jesus dealt with that mess completely. He said "It is finished." In the Greek, it's that word "Tetelestai."

Grace and peace is the remedy for the mess of your life because that grace and peace were bought for us by the blood of Jesus at the cross - His redemption in His own body for God's own glory. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.

The cross teaches us about God's amazing grace. Think about what Jesus said in John 3:16. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Everyone knows that verse, but listen to what follows:

For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were

evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."(John 3:17-21 NKJV).

Jesus's ministry and message was to save us because we were condemned already. All of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and that's one of the reasons the world is so messy, because everybody except Jesus has sinned and fallen short of God's glory. Jesus came to forgive us of those sins. He knew we were condemned and He came to buy us back from all of the things that are holding us back from experiencing God's life.

5. The Spirit Seals In The Present

Not only do we see God the Father adopting us in eternity past and we see God the Son redeeming us in history past, but notice verses 13 and 14. We learn that God the Holy Spirit seals us in the present.

In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory (Ephesians 1:13-14 NKJV).

God's adoption in the eternity past and Jesus's redemption in history past has its application in your life and my life right now by God the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's job is to seal us, to give us the guarantee of our inheritance of Jesus's redemption.

There's a very beautiful picture here, because this idea of the guarantee. In the King James Bible, it is called the surety. Literally, in the Greek, it has the implication of an engagement ring. Think about that. When a man falls in love with a woman, and he wants to marry her, at some point he gets on his knee and he says, "Sweetie, I would love for you to be my bride. Will you marry me?" She says, hopefully, "Yes, yes!" and he puts that engagement ring on her finger. What does that engagement ring mean? Think about it. It means that one day, I'm going to come and you're going to become my bride. It's a promise. It's a promise. It's not just there for the diamond industry, it's there as a promise that every time that gal looks down at that ring, she's going to say, "He said he's going to make me his wife." That's the ministry of the Holy Spirit. He is the engagement ring of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession.

Conclusion

The ministry of the Holy Spirit happens in the present, which is the engagement ring that reminds us every single day that at some point, the Lord Jesus is going to come back,

and He's going to fulfill all of His promises of love to us in full. He's going to bring it to complete fruition.

The reason our messy lives take on new colors is because of this reality of the God of the mess. The God who admittedly it is hard to understand or completely know. It's hard to understand all the distinctions of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, one God in three persons. There's enough writings on the Trinity to fill up many, many, many rooms, and still, we realize we see through a glass dimly, as the Apostle Paul says. At some point, we're going to see face to face, but that's not today. Today we deal with what's right here in Paul's letter to the Ephesians because like you, like me, the church in Ephesus had its own set of messes. He wanted them to realize that God's grace and God's peace applied to us by the very purposes and plans of God transform our mess.

In your messy life and in my messy life -- again, this is why I wrote Honestly, because I want people to get real about the fact that their life is messy. Not only the fact that life is messy, you already know that life is messy. What Paul wants you to know in an equally substantial way is that Jesus is real and that there is a God who reigns sovereign over the mess of our lives. If we allow ourselves with the eyes of faith to behold who God is, God will transform our mess so that we see it as the beautiful canvas on which God creates a life in Christ that will resound to the praise of His glory.

MESSAGE #3 The Bad and Good News - Ephesians 2:1-10

TEACHER'S NOTES:

Part of the focus on Honestly is that we are both worse than we realize and that God's love is greater than we can fathom. I found this reality right in Ephesians 2:1-10

- It's important to bridge the original context of the Scriptures into our contemporary and local context
- There is an authenticity that as a preacher you bring out by sharing your own struggles with messiness and how God's grace comes to bear on your own life.
- The second half of this passage is amazing to teach through and pregnant with meaning.
- Given some of the artistic focus of Honestly, you can easily see why I focused on Ephesians 2:10, God creating in us what we can be a part of.

OUTLINE

1. You are worse than you realize
2. Jesus makes dead people alive
3. Grace is God's gift
4. God prepared you for good works

Introduction

One of the things that I believe is an important part of life is about being honest. Oftentimes we have a tendency as individuals to not be truly honest about something but to whitewash things instead. That's part of our personalities. Nobody actually wants to say, "Oh yeah, what I did is horrible." Everyone says, "Well, I just didn't get that thing quite right." We have a tendency not to go all the way to see something for what it exactly is. The danger in that is when we whitewash things and aren't truly honest about them, it keeps us from getting to experience all that God wants us to experience.

I recently wrote a book called, Honestly, and I framed it around the Book of Ephesians because one of the things I love so much about the work of the Holy Spirit through a writer like the Apostle Paul is the Holy Spirit has a tendency to make us be really, really honest. The Holy Spirit doesn't beat around the bush all that much. He wants to tell us exactly what's going on so that we know what we're dealing with. In a lot of ways the book of Ephesians gives us the opportunity to be truly honest. If we are willing to take God's word, not only the book of Ephesians but from Genesis to Revelation, and view ourselves in light of His revealed word, if we're willing to do that, it will force us to be truly honest with ourselves.

I want to show you something really beautiful. It's a passage that I use in a lot of places in the book, Honestly, because I think is so important in this idea of being honest with ourselves.

Look what it says in Ephesians chapter 2, in verse 1. It says,

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others (Ephesians 2:1-3 NKJV).

1. You Are Worse Than You Realize

Now, really what the Apostle Paul was telling the church in Ephesus - and if we're willing to look at our messy lives he's telling us - is that we're all worse than we realize. Now, don't get me wrong. If I were to ask you about your life, if you were to ask me about my life, (or better yet, if you were to ask my spouse about my life), they'll tell you all sorts of things. He does this well, he does this bad, and so forth, but almost never would you hear somebody describe their life in the terms that the Spirit of God inspires the Apostle Paul to describe it. Look at it again:

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others (Ephesians 2:1-3 NKJV).

See, this is such an honest take on a person outside of Jesus that we are way worse than we realize; that we're dead in our trespasses and our sins. God tells us that our transgressions, our lapses, our sins, our shortcomings, our missing of the mark - we're dead in those things. That's definitely worse than we realize and not only that. And not only that, we have a tendency to walk according to the course of the world, according to the spirit of the age, according to the prince of the power of the air. And we learn that outside of Jesus every human being is under the sway of Satan and the demonic realm. On top of all of that, we conducted ourselves outside of Jesus according to the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind.

Pretty much, each one of us, outside of Jesus, and left up to our own devices are going to do whatever comes to our minds and we'll follow the ways of the flesh. Now, we know that this idea of flesh in the Bible is not just our skin or our bodies. It's our bodies in rebellion against God; each one of us living in such a way that it is in rebellion against God and because of this lifestyle, by nature we're children of wrath. Each one of us

outside of Jesus deserves God's wrath because of the rebellion that we're living in because we're going along with the current of the world that we live in. There has never once been a generation in all of humanity where everybody does everything in accordance with the purposes and plans of God. Every single group of people has a spirit of their age that is in rebellious against God. Because of that, mankind is under God's wrath.

Now, isn't that honest? Of course I don't like having to say it but that's why the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul to write it because left up to our own devices, we're not going to be this honest. We're not going to say, "You know it's true, I'm worse than I realize," but that's why the Bible is here to help us. We learn how to move through the mess of our lives and come to understand that the mess of our lives is directly connected to the fact that we are all worse than we realize.

Listen to what the Apostle Paul says in Romans, Chapter 3, when he strings all these Old Testament verses together:

"As it is written there is none righteous, no not one. There is none who understands. There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside. They have all together become unprofitable. There is none who does good, no not one. Their throat is an open tomb. With their tongues they have practiced deceit. The poison of asps is under their lips whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood. Destruction and misery are in their ways and the way of peace they haven't known. There is no fear of God before their eyes." (Romans 3:10-18 NKJV).

That's brutal honesty isn't it? That is who we are outside of God. You might say, "Okay, that's pretty depressing. What are we going to do with that now?"

1. Jesus Makes Dead People Alive

I'm worse than I realize but that's not the end of the story because look at how the Apostle Paul continues in Ephesians chapter 2:4:

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:4-7 NKJV).

When we realize that we are worse than we thought and come to an understanding of how bad we really are, it creates a backdrop for the, "But God." The worse we are, the more profoundly good God's good news is.

It's even better and the lesson is that Jesus makes dead people alive and that's powerful. See, the Bible doesn't teach that Jesus makes good people better. It teaches that God makes dead people alive. When we began, we were dead in our trespasses and sins but then in verse 4, "But God, who is rich in mercy because of his great love with which he has loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses he made us alive together with Christ."

My friends, that is the good news that grabs hold of our hearts. Although we were dead, although we were worse than we realized, in God's mercy (and He's plenty rich in mercy) and His great love that he has bestowed upon us - although we were dead - He made us alive in Christ. That transforms everything. That is the message of hope that prompted me to write the book, *Honestly*. It is this hope that the Bible proclaims, this message of good news that God makes dead people alive, people like me, like you, who were dead in our trespasses, and sins, and our shortcomings, and our oversights - He makes us alive in Christ.

Jesus puts it this way:

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life (John 5:24 NKJV).

This is such good news. This is the hope that we have in Jesus that although we were dead ... but God. I love that word, "but" in the Bible. I call them the "glorious buts" of the Bible because it's a contrast of monumental proportion - although we're dead, but God... I want you to see your life that way. I want you to see in the messiness of my life, and all the issues, and the fact that I'm worse than I realize - ... but God. God is doing a work and he's made us alive together with Christ.

See, although we were dead, Jesus died the death that we deserved. That's what the cross is all about. Paul, in 2 Corinthians 5:21: "*But he made him who knew no sin to be sin for us.*" At the cross Jesus took our place but the cross isn't the end of the story because Jesus was resurrected from the grave, conquering sin and death. That's why that verse continues, "*He made him who knew no sin to be sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in him.*" (2 Corinthians 5:21 NKJV).

This is so exciting because although we are worse than we realize, God's grace is even better than we can fathom - that God can take dead people, like me and like you, and he can make us alive again.

Look again at Ephesians 2:6-7:

and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus (NKJV).

As you and I are in Christ now and at the point when we step into eternity - at our last breath on planet earth or at the return of the Lord - what God has done is going to be a continuing witness, that's going to show God's amazing grace. Your life and my life are designed to be testimonies of God's grace both here and in Heaven. The Bible actually talks about how the angels look upon the people of God who have been blood bought by Jesus, sealed by the Holy Spirit, and they are in awe of God because of what he's doing in fallen humanity.

What a powerful, honest look at life - that we are way worse than we realize and God's love and grace is so much more extravagant than we can fathom. And that he doesn't make good people better. He makes dead people alive.

Grace is God's Gift

Now, you noticed in verse 5 Paul sneaks in a little parenthetical phrase, "By grace you have been saved," and then he picks that back up again as he continues in Ephesians 2:8:

"For by grace you have been saved through faith that is not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works lest anyone should boast." (NKJV)

Grace is God's gift and it is by grace we are saved through faith. The gift of God's grace is actually the gift of God himself but it's a gift that only God can give. The application of Jesus' finished work to our lives comes through faith and even that faith is not of ourselves but comes from God. So, God gives us the faith to receive His gift of grace.

Paul makes a very important clarification. He says, "Not of works, lest anyone should boast," and yet even two thousand years after the finished work of Jesus this is still a big problem because for so many of us we feel like, "I experience God's grace by whether or not I have a good day. I experience God's grace by whether or not I do the right things." Now, depending on what tribe within Christianity you're nurtured in, everybody has a different set of works you're supposed to do. What's amazing is God's grace is bestowed, not based on our works but based on the work of Jesus - His perfect work. His finished work. If it is of us, then we could boast. That's why Paul says, "Not of works, lest anyone should boast."

God's design in the work of Jesus, as he makes dead people alive to his own glory, is that everyone knows God did this. I didn't do it. I can't take credit for this. God has given it to us as a gift and we need to make sure that we reach out with the hands of faith and receive that gift and walk in it every single day because grace that has been received is also grace that we live out every single day. God wants us to move through our messy lives being totally honest about who we really are but also experiencing God's extravagant grace.

Listen to how John expresses this in his Gospel:

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:12-13 NKJV).

That's so powerful isn't it? That God gave us the right to become his children by us receiving Jesus, by saying, thank you is humbling and transforming. Jesus is our entrance and sustenance in the family of God every single day. That changes how we see ourselves because although we see ourselves as now worse than we realize, we see ourselves also in Jesus and we can be honest. We can be honest about that because God is so good.

God Prepared You For Good Works

Then from there Paul continues in verse 10:

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10 NKJV).

That word workmanship is the Greek word, poema, where we get our English word, poem. It's a transliteration out of the Greek. In a way it's saying that we are all God's work of art, that each one of us is uniquely one of God's poems that he's writing. God is the great artist, which inspired a big part of my book, Honestly. I talk a lot about art, and the artist heart of God, and how God wants us to see ourselves in the same way. The truth is we are his piece of art created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we would walk in.

Now, this is important because we're not saved by works, we're saved for works. Jesus did the work to save us and God has already prepared beforehand certain things that God has uniquely created us to do. People always say, "Is it faith and works? Is it faith or works?" I like to say, "No, it's faith that works." Our faith in Jesus, because of the grace of God, works itself out in each one of us since we are God's workmanship. God has created us in Christ for certain things that we are meant to do. I like to call this the sweet spot. It's that convergence where the passions that God has given us, the gifting that He has bestowed upon us, and the needs of the world come together as we walk in the good works that God created us for in Christ.

Conclusion

In a lot of ways, one of the focuses we need as we're honest with our own lives and as we walk through our messes, is to say, "Lord, I want to live out in my own life the good

works that you've created me for. I want to embrace fully this grace that I'm experiencing. I recognize the fact that I was dead and you made me alive, and even though I was worse than I realized, your grace is more extravagant than I realized and you've given it to me as a gift. Because of this, I want to walk out your purposes and plans for my life. I want to live out the works that You created me, in Christ, to do.

This is how to make life in a messy world one that is filled with great purpose and eternal focus. I believe that for each brother or sister in the body of Christ, God has this foreordained life that we're supposed to live and would to God that each one of us would find it.

MESSAGE 4 - The Fruit - Ephesians 4:1-16

TEACHER'S NOTES:

Ephesians 4:1-16 makes a beautiful and concise message, especially given the format of The Fruit of _____ is _____. I use this idea through Honestly to show how the messiness of a present situation is designed to bear fruit in our lives. The fruit that God bears now sets the context for the next lesson God desires to teach you.

- Great sermon packaging makes the points of the message memorable.
- Sometimes you can't beat the classic 3-point, well-packaged message
- There is a lot of depths that you can plume in the midst of a more simply packaged message
- Notice how I chose to spend more time focusing on the "marks" of maturity. I found this to be very important to help people catch a fresh vision for their lives.

OUTLINE

1. The fruit of humility is unity
2. The fruit of unity is ministry
3. The fruit of ministry is maturity

Introduction

One of the things that God is wanting to do in each one of our lives is to bear fruit. That's what this life is about.

Jesus told us that God is glorified when we bear much fruit, and I'm here to tell you that the messy circumstance that we're seeking to be honest and transparent about in our own lives are actually designed by God, so that we would bear fruit that would bring glory to God. God desires our messy circumstances to be object lessons for people to witness how the people of God handle walking through this world, although their lives are just as messy as their neighbors. Because Jesus is real, fruit will be born in our lives.

One of the beautiful things I used in the book was Paul's letter to the Ephesians. It was a perfect backdrop for this whole idea of bearing fruit. We see a beautiful progression of how fruit begets more fruit. Just like when we look over our lives, we see that we start in one place, and we will be learning something, and then that serves as a foundation upon which the next thing is built. And then the next thing, and the next thing.

It happens this way because fruit is progressive. When we learn one thing then God brings us to the next thing, and the next thing. We witness this progression in Ephesians 4:1-6:

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all (Ephesians 4:1-6 NKJV).

1. The Fruit of Humility is Unity

Notice first, that the fruit of humility is unity. The Apostle Paul begins this letter with saying that he is the prisoner of the Lord. He is writing the letter while he's in prison for his work in the name of Jesus. Talk about a mess – he's writing a letter from jail. And the first thing he addresses is this idea of humility because he understands that the fruit of humility in a believer's life is unity. One of the marks of mature church is a unified church. Oftentimes, we just think about it a unified local church, but what about the unified church with a capital "C"? That's the church that includes all the people of God who call on the name of Jesus. This is not unity at all cost, but within the bounds of Orthodox Christianity.

Paul points out all these different things that are unified. There's the unity of the Spirit, the bond of peace. There's only one body. There's only one Holy Spirit. We're only called in one hope and that hope is Jesus. One Lord, one faith, one baptism. See, the fruit of humility leads to unity, but it doesn't stop there.

2. The Fruit of Unity is Ministry

If you skip over to verse 11, it says,

"And he himself gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the equipping of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." (Ephesians 4:11 NKJV).

Now I love this because the fruit of unity is ministry. See, we have all these different positions in the body of Christ. When people are humble, they become one. Right? But they still have different functions. God gave some to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors, and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry.

If you think about these different callings, these different gifts that the Lord gives to the church they are all actually doing very different things. Like, an apostle is going to try

and start new congregations. They're initiators, they're those who are being sent. That's a different calling and focus than a pastor or a teacher, who's going to stay and nurture the same group of people. And if you've been in church long enough, you realize that sometimes the people with more apostolic gifting and the people with more maybe pastoral gifting have a tendency to not see eye to eye. One has their focus on the people who are here now. The other feels compelled to go find other people and start something new. An evangelist is concerned mostly for non-believers, in contrast to a pastor or teacher, who are seeking to disciple and establish new and seasoned believers. And don't forget the prophet! All through the Bible, people don't really like the prophets too much because their job is to call into question the status quo and then to cast a new vision of the future. Suffice it to say that prophets have a tendency to not be running along the same tracks of apostles or evangelists, or pastors or teachers.

Is it any wonder why Paul starts out with a lesson on humility? When people are humble, even with these different gifts, they can stay together and work through their differences. Then notice when unity happens, that ministry happens next. It can happen because God gave apostles and prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry. Wow. When we're humble and we get unified, then all these different gifts learn how to stay together so that the body may be equipped for the work of ministry.

That's God's design. The messiness of our lives that comes from people having different gifts, if we don't hold the gifts humbly it breaks the unity. When we have humility, and we are unified, now it comes together and people get built up in a really powerful way. It is crucial to realize that the body of Christ needs all the body parts to be working together. Think about your own body. If your eyes aren't working so good, it doesn't matter how everything else is working, the body suffers. If your ears aren't working, or if you have a stomach ailment, everything else might be fine, but the faulty ears or the stomach ailments create an impediment for you to be healthy. But when the whole body is in humility, in unity, then it promotes ministry.

3. The Fruit of Ministry Is Maturity

From this point of ministry, Paul picks it up in the middle of verse 12 for one last fruit:

... for the edifying of the body of Christ, ¹³till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; ¹⁴that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, ¹⁵but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love (Ephesians 4:12-16 NKJV).

That completes the beautiful progression of fruit - The fruit of humility is unity. The fruit of unity is ministry. And the fruit of ministry is maturity. When the people of God in the midst of all their different giftings, are humble and unified, and they're together and they're doing the work of ministry, that ministry brings the people of God into full maturity. I love this.

That word "edifying" infers a building up – a strengthening until everyone comes to the unity of the faith, the knowledge of the Son of God, a perfect man, and to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. That word perfect means the complete or a fully mature person. This is something that God wants to do. He wants His people to be humble and unified, and as the work of ministry happens, the people will begin to mature. God wants to grow each one of us up, and He uses our messy lives to show us where we need to grow.

One of the elements for maturity to happen is seen in verse 14:

that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting (Ephesians 4:14 NKJV)

The concept is that as we mature, we're not going to be knocked all around by all the different ideas people come up with. God wants us to have a settled faith – a faith settled on the word of God, and on the finished work of Jesus so that we don't get knocked around all the time.

Notice verse 15, where it says, "speaking the truth in love." This is an extremely important combination of concepts. We need to keep these two together at all times. It's been said that love without truth is hypocrisy, and truth without love is brutality. The bible teaches us that we should keep truth and love together. Think about it, if you have truth without love, you have a tendency to hurt people with the truth. It becomes the brutal truth, because the truth is what it is, but we actually don't love that person so we don't package the delivery with love. For many people in the body of Christ, they know the truth, they know what the Bible says, but they actually don't love the person on the other side. It becomes brutal, it hurts people. It scares people away.

I like to always use the picture that as Christians we need to have a good bedside manner. Think about a doctor who has a good bedside manner. He realizes he has to deliver a hard truth and often an unwanted truth. However, he also realizes that there's a person on the other end. A person created in the image and likeness of God who has feelings and fears. The difference between the doctor with good bedside manner and bad bedside manner, isn't the truth that they share, but it's the love that they have for the person on the other end. The Bible says we don't want to have truth without love because it's brutality. It hurts people. How many people have been turned off from

Jesus because somebody who believes in Him has shared the truth but didn't do it in love? It happens each and everyday unfortunately.

Yet we need to be careful not to fall off the other side of the horse. Love without truth is hypocrisy. A lot of people are struggling with that today. The Bible says what it says, and it means what it says. God gave us His heart in a book for a reason, but we have a tendency to want to dumb it down in the name of love. "Oh, woah, we love everybody." We don't actually want to tell them the truth because it might hurt their feelings, but that isn't really love. That is hypocrisy.

That's why in 1st Corinthians 13, it says, "Love does not rejoice in inequity, but rejoices in the truth." There are all sorts of people who love God. They love Jesus, but they're falling off that side of the horse that they're saying, "We love everybody. God loves everybody, and it doesn't matter." No, it really does matter. Love and truth come together as a package deal. Speaking the truth in love - that's the sweet spot. We know the truth, and we love the truth. We know and love people. That's what God is. The Bible tells us that Jesus is the same way - He's full of grace and truth - not choosing one at the expense of the other, but holding the two of them together. That's one of the marks of maturity.

It's not the only one, though. There's another beautiful mark here too in verse 16:

from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love (Ephesians 4:16 NKJV).

Another mark of maturity is community or interconnectedness. Each one of us sees ourselves as part of the body with Jesus as the head, and we're all in it together by what we all supply. Our culture values individualism but individualism in the Bible is actually a mark of spiritual immaturity. It is immature because all through Scripture we see that we're called to community. That's why it references things in the plural, like "we should love the Lord *our* God, or "Our Father who art in heaven." Jesus didn't teach us to say, "My Father who is in Heaven." He taught us to say "Our Father..." God sees us connected to one another under the authority of Jesus.

Conclusion

How beautiful is this that fruit bearing is progressive. The fruit of humility becomes unity, and the fruit of unity becomes ministry, and then the fruit of ministry becomes maturity. I tackled this topic of progressive fruit bearing my book *Honestly* because I wanted people to see that the things they are going through, the experiences they are having are all connected to the work God is doing to bear fruit in their lives right where they are at that moment in time. I wanted them to know that the things that are happening are not random, they're actually purposeful and God wants to redeem these messy things in our lives. God could use someone's current situation to bear a very specific

piece of fruit that He could build upon, and continue doing that through the next experience, and the next experience. My own life and story that I share in the book simply tells some of those things that I learned during the messiness of my own life. I used all these other examples to be able to show the fact that when God bears fruit here, He's not done. There's another thing He's going to do next that builds upon that fruit. Then, all of a sudden, when we start to see our life as God's story in our situation, we start to get hope in the messes. God's teaching me that it's not just about the moment, but its also about what He's going to do next, and next, and next, and next. When those dots connect, then we start to live a life that is absolutely astounding and adventurous. Sure there are things we don't understand about it, but we also know that Jesus is real and He knows what He's doing.