

On Friday morning, Mark and I took our youngest child, our daughter Mara, to move into college for her 1st year. My new full time appointment here as your pastor has kept me busy so I haven't been focusing too much on this important stage of growth, but the reality is, this has been a major step for her and even bigger one for me. Especially now that both of our kids are out of the house in college and Mark and I are officially empty nesters. Of course I'm thankful she's been able to take this step in growing up, but there's a huge part of me that didn't want her to grow up either. You know what I'm talking about. Of course you want to grow and want others to grow, but growing up is hard to do.

Today we're looking at growing up in our faith- according to Paul in First Corinthians. This is the 3rd in a series of seven sermons studying 1 Corinthians and today we're looking at a portion of chapter 3. Don't forget there are copies of past sermons in the Narthex and you can watch past sermons online - youtube and Facebook - in case you missed part of this series and want to catch up.

Thinking of growing up - if I asked you to choose - in your mind - one of your most difficult parts of growing up, I wonder what your answer would be? Would you think of family situations... or school experiences... or friendships.. or choices you made you wish you could go back and change?

For me, when I think about growing up and one thing that was difficult, I think of how it was hard for me to maintain a healthy diet. You could say I liked my Grandmother's cooking so I was a little overweight coming out of middle school and going into high school. I struggled with healthy eating.

For the youth of this generation there is a lot of discussion about being, or becoming, vegetarian or vegan for health reasons and for the environment. When I was growing up, I don't remember any discussions about food like that. All around us for lunch and anywhere we looked were chips, soft drinks, brownies, cookies and pretty fattening options. My high school had really great, thick, yummy milk shakes, so one of the lunch favorites was a chocolate milkshake with chocolate chip cookies. Not a very good diet.

One of the markers for growth Paul mentions here in I Corinthians is about a SPIRITUAL diet. I'm going to mention today a few markers that will propel us toward spiritual growth. Some of the things Paul says in this lesson we're looking at today seem a little harsh, but there's a verse in chapter 4 of I Corinthians, verse 14, that can help us set the whole tone, so let me read that to you now. Paul says "I am not writing this to make you ashamed, but to guide you as my beloved children." Please hear these words of Paul in the tone he intends - to guide us, not to shame as at all.

The first marker for spiritual growth that's going to guide us ishaving a progressing spiritual diet. Having a progressing spiritual diet. I invite you to open a Bible or Bible app and look with me at the 1st part of our scripture lesson for today - I Corinthians 3:1-7. In verses 1 & 2, if we look back there, Paul is challenging the Corinthians about their spiritual diet. Just as we physically need things to grow, we also need some things to spiritually grow. Physically we start out with milk when we're babies. We know babies need milk, because they aren't able to process other foods yet and there's no shame in that. Just like that, when we come to know God through Christ initially, we are more or less at the stage of an infant needing easy to swallow and understand instruction and there is no shame in it. In fact, one of our early church historians, Turtullian, when he would baptize an adult, he would put a bottle of milk on the altar to symbolize their first steps as a new Christian.

Physically, babies need someone to feed them one on one whether it's milk or just starting more solid foods. Imagine taking a baby to a buffet and saying - here you go - feed yourself! Well, sometimes we do that in churches. We tell people about all the groups and classes available and tell them to go plug in, when what they might really need is a little one on one attention initially.

Or think about this.... It's a phrase I've said before - "I decided that group wasn't for me, because I wasn't getting fed." But how long has it been since I really needed someone to feed me? Was I really an infant in Christ needing to be fed? Maybe what I was really trying to say was that in order to feed myself, because I'm an adult and I'm the only one who can

determine what my body/mind/heart needs - I just need something a little different, because of the stage of spiritual growth I was at.

Maybe I was at the stage where I needed *a little bit of help*, like a sandwich that I don't make, but I *can* eat by myself. Or maybe it was like needing Ramen Noodles - Something in my youth I could make and eat for myself, but it needed to be easy to make. Or maybe, I was at the stage where I needed some meat - something that I needed to prepare and *chew* on a little. Or Maybe, I'm mature enough and full enough that my growth will come by feeding others instead. You see what I'm trying to get to here? We all have different phases of spiritual growth just like we do physically.

Where do you see yourself, spiritually - do you need milk, a sandwich, ramen noodles, meat or is it time for you to feed others?

I think the main point with this first spiritual marker of - having a progressing spiritual diet - is don't let yourself get stuck. Or if you're stuck, help yourself get unstuck. Don't keep eating milkshakes and cookies for lunch every day. Figure out what you really NEED to grow spiritually and then seek it out.

It's amazing to me that this sermon in this series corresponds to giving out Bibles to 4th graders and up today. I didn't plan that, it just worked out that way. A God thing I believe.

But here is an opportunity you are providing to spiritually feed 20 young people. Praise God! Thank you for your support.

Another marker is "Building a life with eternity in mind." Look at I Corinthians 3:10-16. "Building a life with eternity in mind." Some of the BUILDING materials Paul talks about are wood, hay and straw - these were the things houses in Corinth were made of. Paul was saying - don't just do the ordinary thing like everyone else is doing. Do what you are called to do with eternity in mind. The temple where people worshiped and prayed was the place where things made of gold, precious stones and cloth were found. And Paul was saying go and build your life out of things like that which will echo into eternity. Not things that will pass away with time, but will last and even grow in value. Things like the original foundation laid in you - Jesus Christ - who is eternal.

As I've mentioned before. I didn't have the pleasure of knowing Sally Carlson. But many of you knew her extremely well. Dick especially, of course, her husband. Sally is a great example to all of us of one who built her life out of things that continue to live into eternity - serving God through her leadership at Settlement House, formally adopting and raising not only three children who are now making lives and families of their own, but unofficially adopting the friends of those children who also call her Mom. She was extremely careful how she built on her firm foundation of Jesus Christ in her life. As it says in verse 14 - If what one builds survives, they will receive their reward. I do believe Sally, in some way I don't understand in this life, is receiving her reward in heaven and her family is receiving their reward in many ways now.

As it says in the Message translation for these verses - "Take particular care in picking out your building materials." Jesus calls us to make investments that will last forever. One pastor told his congregation - the only two things that last FOREVER are the Word of God and the souls of people. What precious things are we building day by day?