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**THE NAZARETH PROJECT**  
**"Growing Toward Maturity"**

**Ephesians 4:11-16**

September 26, 2007- Wednesday, 6:30PM - Dr. David H. McKinley

**[Dr. McKinley, message, Growing Toward Maturity]**

Ah... by many points of grace. And that God has met you... God has ah... strengthened you, supplied for you all that you need because His grace is ever sufficient. And of course, the greatest need that He meets is our need for forgiveness and for freedom that are found in Christ; His work for us on the cross. His death, His burial, His resurrection changes everything about life and I am so thankful for the wonderful message of God's grace.

Now we've talked about His grace, sung about His grace, we are Christians and believers because of the grace of God in our lives. But once we step into the grace of God and begin to live out that grace ah... we learn what it means to be followers... to be disciples... to be students of the word of God. And I'm wondering tonight what kind of students I have here with me.

Each of you have had some level of ah... educational training in your life. We've all been maybe different places, different times, different stages along the way, but ah... you've had some level of educational experience in your life. And so tonight I want to find out just a little bit about ah... what... ah... what you are as a student. And the way I want to do that is I want to ask you as a student whenever you have had to take a test, what kind of test did you do best? Multiple choice? How many multiple choice... who would say my favorite test is a multiple choice? Okay, I got a whole section here and here. Alright great, guys, right down here.

How about ah... who would say fill in the blank? I love fill in the blanks. Well there are a few less of those. Not very many of us like to fill in the blanks. What about essay? Have any essay people? That's me, I loved essays. I'm a verbal person. I like to write. I could do that. I can't write worth a flip and so the great thrill was to write all I could on a piece of paper to see if they even cared about reading. It was easier just to give me a grade. And so I like the essay.

Then true-false... anybody like true-false? A few of us like that. We've got some true-false right here. And ah... that's actually the kind of test we're going to take tonight. A true-false test. So, you ready for this? Here's the statement: Every activity of the church must be biblically based and aligned with God's stated purpose for His people. Is that true or is that false? Every activity of the church must be biblically based and aligned with God's stated purpose for His people. What is the answer? Oh, so you're so uncertain, you don't know, you think this is a trick question, don't you? Alright, here's the answer: It's true. It's absolutely true! Can you

agree and say, "Yes, that's true." It sounded true, didn't it? You just thought I was going to be a great deceiver. But I really came just to present truth tonight; that's why I'm here. And one of the greatest truths that we can agree and affirm tonight in this place is the church of Jesus Christ is the fact that every activity of the church must be biblically based and aligned with God's stated purpose for His people.

That's why we've been looking at the fourth chapter of the book of Ephesians. We've been trying to understand something about the work of Jesus Christ in His people, the Church. We've called this the Nazareth Project. And tonight I want you to look with me in Ephesians chapter 4, and we're going to begin reading again in verse 11 because here we are outlining God's stated purpose for His people. Here we are looking at the biblical basis of what we do and how we do it in ministry and in our walk with Christ. The Scriptures says, beginning in Ephesians 4 and verse 11:

*11) And He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors, and teachers, 12) to equip the saints for the work of the ministry.*

We talked about this last week. God has given leadership gifts to the church to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. Not so that they would equip the saints and they would do the work of the ministry but that they would equip the saints to do the work of the ministry.

That is, we said that pastors and teachers and leaders in the church are not to be like ah... the field goal unit on a football team. They're not kickers just coming out to make one big performance, and everybody to either cheer or to boo. We said that what it is like, is like a quarterback who needs... needs to know how to get the ball to the right person to make the play. And every person has a role in making the plays and making things happen. And so this whole idea of the order and of the design and of the function of the gifts that God has given to the church is seen here in chapter 4, beginning in verse 11.

*12) to equip the saints for the work of the ministry for the building up of the body of Christ, 13) 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; 14) so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and from by the waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness and deceitful schemes. 15) Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to... (What are the next two words?) we are to grow up... (Say that with me)...grow up in everyway to Him who is the head—into Christ— 16) from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each... when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*

As we read this passage of Scripture, we're reading the Bible, we're understanding God's stated pur... purpose for the church, and it is simply this: that growth as it relates to the church, collectively, and Christians individually, is God's idea and not our idea. God wants His church to grow!

And the idea of growth is not just my idea, your idea, it's God's idea! He want His church to be healthy! He wants His church to produce! He wants His church to grow and to grow up. And so that's exactly what we are looking at and talking about tonight.

Jesus said in Matthew 16:18 "*I will build My church.*" That's the idea of something that will be built up, built and established. And Jesus the Carpenter of Nazareth, determined that He would build His church, demonstrates to us in His word in Ephesians how this building process takes place. For that reason we've taken four weeks to investigate that process and to examine that process.

What God wants in the church is He wants His church to build up and He wants His church to grow up. In many ways what God wants in the growth of the church is He wants enlargement which has everything to do with the size of the church, as it grows and reaches people and.. and influences more and more. And that is to be the work of going into the world, preaching and baptizing. And then God wants His church to have enrichment; that is maturity, to grow up in strength, discipleship and maturity.

And so we are to cooperate with God's plan. We are to keep that in our focus and we are to live out the growth that God desires and demands in our lives as He works in and through us together as members of this church.

The problem is today churches are filled with people who are stunted in their own Christian growth. We have a lot of stunted believers. And our churches are unhealthy and our churches are weak and our churches are struggling because members of those churches and believers in those churches are not growing Christians.

I heard about a boy who came up to his mom, smiled real big and said, "Mom, I just measured, and I am 8 feet, 4 inches tall." The only problem is, she was looking down at him when he was saying that to her. And she said, "Well, honey, how in the world did you decide that?" He took her over to a little place there in the door and he had made a notch on the door like she'd done before, but then he pulled out his ruler. The only problem was the only ruler that he had was one of those that you buy for your kids in elementary school. It was a 6-inch ruler, not a 12-inch ruler. He was actually 4 foot 2. And so that's the problem, he had an issue with his measure of growth.

And I'm afraid that too many of us are not measuring growth by biblical standards. Too many of us are failing to see and to understand what God wants to do in the growth process of our lives. And therefore, what needs to happen is that we need to, again, go back, look at the word of God, agree together that God is interested in our growth, and then we need to give attention to that growth in our lives.

So what I want to talk about tonight is simply this idea of growth toward maturity.. growth toward maturity. Look at two verses with me. Verse 13.. we just read it but let's look at it one more time. Verse 13:

13) *until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood.*

God wants us to grow up in full stature! He doesn't want us to be stunted. And then look again in verse 15:

15) *speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in everyway to Him who is the head—into Christ—...*

Build up, grow up! Maturity! Full stature! This is God's stated plan for His church.

Now having said that, let's look at some insights about this growth tonight. And the first thing that I want us just to pause and think about, is that according to the Bible, growth toward maturity is a process. It's a process! That's such an important thing for me to communicate and to affirm to you tonight. Spiritual growth is a process! While coming to Christ brings us to a crisis that changes life from what we were before to what we become in the future, and it's clearly a transformation from darkness to light.

Becoming a Christian is not a quick fix of all of the problems that you've ever had in life. You have learned that, haven't you? You can be a Christian and have some real big problems... you know that? Can I get an Amen? [Amen] Alright! I just want to know that we [have] got human beings out here in front of me tonight! Being a Christian is not a quick fix to all of the issues and challenges of life. In fact, one of the greatest surprises is when we come to Christ, we wake up one day and say, "Why did it take me so long to realize I needed Jesus?"

But then a few months later we wake up and think, "What is wrong with me? I can't seem to get this down! I keep making the same mistakes! I keep tripping over the same sins! I keep struggling with things in my life! I'm just not a good Christian!" Have you ever felt that way? Just felt like you weren't a good Christian, and you wanted to be and you were striving to be?

Well, the reason that that's true is that spiritual growth is a process. There is no such thing as FedX-faith: absolutely positively overnight! There's just no FedX-faith! And when you become a Christian, it doesn't mean that God just gives you a little FedX package and then just suddenly from there on in life's a breeze!

No, just the opposite! Christian growth is a process and it takes time, and it takes tests, and it takes trials and temptations and so many things more to help you to grow in life. The faith that you have in Christ doesn't fix everything, but it gives you a focus in the midst of all the struggles of life to help you to grow in maturity in Christ. Salvation is not... is not... is... is not a finish line; it's a starting line! And when you get saved, you start the Christian life, you start Christian growth, but there's that

whole process that you have to go through. And like most projects, the Nazareth Project include... like most projects, projects always have some things in common.

If you've ever done renovation in your home... if you've ever decided that you were going to be a "DIY" - a do-it-yourselfer, I promise you can agree with this: almost every project you get into, it takes longer than you planned... agreed...? "I'm just going to take a few minutes and get this done." Two days later you're thinking, "How in the world did I get into this mess!" It takes longer than you plan, it costs more than you expected, it is messier than you anticipated and it requires greater perseverance than you ever thought. Would you agree with me about that? If you've ever tried to do a project... a remodeling project, to do... it's always longer than you planned, cost more than you expected, messier than you anticipated and requires greater perseverance than you ever expected!

I would submit to you that's the Christian life! Once you become a follower of Christ, it's always harder, longer, more costly, messier, and takes more perseverance than we ever expected. And yet the Bible teaches us over and over again in the lives of saints in the Old Testament, and in the principles of the New Testament that God is working in your life and He is working in my life, in the people, in the problems, in the pressures, in the pain; God is at work in these things in my life and it's a part of the process of growth that is intended to lead me to maturity. Not my maturity. Yes, it's personal, but maturity meaning into the fullest stature of Christ, that I might be more like Jesus Christ. And that's what God is shaping in you; that's what God is shaping in me.

Do you remember those time lapse ah... films that you would see back when you were in, say, junior high and high school? That would show you what's really going on when a plant's growing. You remember those things... they'd be there, and of course, if you stood over a plant and watched it... I mean, you know what it's like watching a plant. You know, you talk about something that's not very exciting; you talk about something that's just boring! Just stand and watch a plant for about an hour and say, I just want to watch it grow. Ha, no. But you have some of that time-lapse photography and all of the sudden you can begin to watch the... the leaves unfold and the blossoms open and all that... You know that time-lapse thing is really incredible!

And in the Christian life, if you just try to look at yourself and say, "am I growing?" it's going to be like studying a plant! You're going to be frustrated. But if you will look at God's work in time... if you will look at God's work in your life, you will begin to see that He is growing you through the process of maturity.

And what I'm saying at this point is simply that you can't measure your growth by a moment. You have to measure it through seasons of life. You look at a moment in time, you can't tell if you're growing. But if you'll look at seasons of your life, you'll begin to see that God's grace has

ministered to you, that God's mercy has touched you, that God's love has sustained you. And for this reason we need a lot of encouragement... we need encouragement. The whole book of Hebrews is written over and over, built around this phrase: "Let us go on... let us go on... let us go on." Why? Because we need to keep going and we need to keep growing, because growth toward maturity is a process.

Is it any wonder you come to the end of the book of Hebrews and you get to chapter 11 and there's this list of all these people and all these things that they went through in life, and then finally you get to chapter 12 and the writer of the book says [Hebrews 12:1], "*Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that would so easily beset us, and let us, each and every one of us, run with endurance the race that is set before us, 12) looking unto Jesus...*" You see, we got to keep the focus and keep growing; and growth in your life and in my life toward maturity is a process.

Thank God, He's promised in His word, God is at work in you, He's at work in me (Philippians chapter 1, verse 6) both to will and to do of His good pleasure. God is at work in you, whether you feel it or not, whether you see it or not, God is at work in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure. My question tonight is: Are you cooperating... Are you cooperating? Are you understanding that what God is doing in you is a work of growth and maturity, and it is a process that you must go through in life?

There's a second thing that I want us to see about growth towards maturity tonight and that's not only that it is a process, but growth toward maturity does follow a pattern. While we're not all moving at the same rate and pace, there is a pattern that determines maturity in life. And Christian growth and Christian maturity can ultimately be measured by certain indicators in life. Look again in chapter 4 and let's continue reading after verse 13 saying that God wants us to come to mature manhood "*to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...*". And then it says this, verse 14:

*14) so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves, carried about by every wind of doctrine.*

The Bible says we're not to be like children. Somebody goes, "Wait a minute. Didn't Jesus say we're to be like children?" Yes, we're to be child-like, simple, depending, trusting. We're to be child-like, but we're not to be childish. And being childish is being immature, being childish is not being able to have discipline or control. And therefore, the Bible here says that as you are growing in maturity, then the change in life is simply this: you're not going to be like a child who's just tossed to and fro, as the Bible says, by every wind of doctrine. Back and forth, back and forth. The idea here is, is that Christian maturity can be identified by stability... stability.

Are you a stable Christian? I personally believe this is one of the things that is missing in so many today. I'm amazed at how many people are sincere people, but they're shallow people. They have no depth to their faith; they have no roots in their faith. And whatever wind of doctrine comes alone, they're just tossed to and fro, back and forth; just like a ship without any course or direction in the midst of a storm. That's how they live their lives! And they go from this doctrine to this doctrine, from this conference to this conference, this teacher to this teacher, without any discernment, without any discretion. There is no stability in their lives! There's nothing stable about what they believe! They're just like children who don't know how close they are sometimes to danger.

Are you amazed sometimes at the way that people allow their children to play on a parking lot? I don't know about anything that... that... that causes greater response and ire in me than when I see someone... I have to admit, typically a father... who walks out of a store and allows his kids to just run down the aisle in a parking lot. Now that child's having a great time. A child may be racing his sibling or his friend. But the reality is that child doesn't have a sense... the sense to know that a running car might quickly be a moving car and that their very life could be taken away in a moment.

And see, just like children, when we don't have any sense of biblical and spiritual stability in life... when there are no roots to our faith, then we're just like children; we're playing with danger and don't know it. That's why the Bible makes such a big deal out of the need to grow in Christ so that our lives will be marked by stability. The opposite of stability is inconsistency and it is all a part of immaturity.

And it's also true in how they behave. Not only what they... what they do, but how they behave... how children act. Sometimes they don't know what they believe. They don't know that they're near danger, but then they behave in a way that is just so spontaneous and erratic. Now obviously being a child is fun, and I love to be around children and I love to even stir it up when I'm with kids.

But I was reminded of this just a few Wednesday evenings ago. Connie and I, following a service, went by Baskin-Robbins... 31 flavors, I love it! Don't you? Thirty-one flavors! It's fabulous! But we walked in the door and we were there just a moment trying to pick out that specific flavor that we wanted. And suddenly, open the door, and four kids come running in. And I mean they are like ping-pong balls in the midst... I mean, they're just bouncing off the walls and every one of them is calling out one flavor to another and they're running up and down. And one of them's over there, you know, boldly saying something about how this is the greatest flavor in the world, and a second later his friend convinces him that the other flavors better. You know, they're just... they're just back and forth, just everywhere. And I'm sure when it was all said and done, they probably all four walked out with vanilla. You know that's just how kids are! I mean... they're... they're just everywhere!

And you know, I know a lot of Christians like that. I know churches full of people like that. They're just scattered; they're just shallow. There's just no stability to their lives. Why? Because they're not growing to maturity. And therefore what we end up with are people who have 31 flavors of theology and have every kind of... of thought you can imagine. They're unstable, they're gullible, they're immature. God forbid that we would be... would make that acceptable for us as a congregation.

Not only is there the issue of stability, the Bible says that maturity is also measured by responsibility. Verse 14 says that they're *"no longer tossed like children to and fro by the waves, carried about by every wind of doctrine."* But then verse 15 says:

*15) rather, speaking the truth in love, we grow up in every way to Him who is the head, 16) from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint, by which it is equipped, even each part is working properly.*

Responsibility... a mark of maturity is responsibility. Being willing to take something and to be responsible for it. Of course, it begins with our speech. How important it is that our speech is reflective of the truth of a Christ-centered life; that my speech is directed in a way that I speak the truth in love. How those things all need to be true in life. The truth in life!

Warren Wiersbe, the Bible commentator, said this: "It's been said that truth without love is brutality." You know that, don't you? People can say something to you that's true, but without love, it can just be brutal. But love without truth is hypocrisy. You're holding back something that people need to hear. And so the reality is, is that to be responsible in speech, I begin to let the word of God take on in me a root and bear a fruit that marks and changes my speech... speaking the truth in love.

But also that every part is working together. Responsible people are dependable people. They're trustworthy people, they're connected people. In the church that means they're people who understand their gift. They understand the importance of their role, whether it's a big role or a small role, and they're willing to engage that role together with other believers to make a difference for Jesus Christ. Responsibility. It's a part of this measurable of maturity.

And when we are saying that we are maturing in Christ, if we're attending everything and not attending to the very things that God has called us to do, then we're not being responsible. There needs to be a heart of responsibility.

There's a third thing that marks spiritual maturity in my life. It's not only stability and responsibility, but the next thing is something that we see in verse 17 and following. We haven't read this portion yet, but as you go on and read in verse 17, it says:



17) *Now this I say, and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds.*

It says in verse 19:

19) *They have become callous, and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.*

What is the mark of maturity? A life of purity. Purity is a mark of Christian maturity. Not self-righteousness that says I'm better than everyone else, but a clear vulnerability and an understanding that I must depend upon the grace of God and the Spirit of God every day in my life, that I don't want to live a life that is marked by stain and immorality and impurity. Though I live in a world that is filled with sensuality, walking as the Gentiles would walk, instead there is in me a desire to have a heart and a life of purity.

Holiness is not a church word. Holiness is the calling of every blood-bought follower of Jesus Christ. [1 Corinthians 6:19-20] *"What, know ye know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit? You have been bought with a price, therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are His."* And Christian maturity can be seen and marked by purity. Not to measure purity is to measure life by some standard other than Jesus Christ because He is the ultimate example of purity.

So what are the marks of Christian growth... Christian maturity? Stability, responsibility, purity. There's another one... chapter 5, verse 2. You see, you've got to remember this is a letter. It's all connected. And just because we're in one portion doesn't mean that Paul hasn't continued to develop his themes going on through. So in chapter 5 he says:

1) *Therefore, be imitators of God as beloved children.* (And then he says in verse 2) 2) *And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us...*

The word... charity. You know in the Old English that's the word that was always translated love. If you've got a King James Bible you know that ah... 1 Corinthians 13, the great love chapter of the Bible, says that "if I have all these things and have not charity, it profits me nothing." And I love the word charity, not because it means handout, but because it means heartout. The word *charity* means that I live my life thinking about others and the wellbeing of others. And a true standard of Christian maturity, one of the lines of demarcation is charity. It is the opposite of immaturity.

You know what immaturity's all about. Two little boys two years old sitting in the same room... one toy in the room... what happens? Does one look at the other and say, ..... No, I can tell you what happens. You let one of those kids get it, the other will crawl over, grab it from him and scream, "Mine!", bang him on the head with it and crawl over to the other side of

the room again. Immaturity. It's all about me. It's all about what I have, of what I don't have.

But you see the mark of Christian maturity is not that. It's not all of what I can do and what I can get and what's about me. It's about charity. It's about loving others. It's about being "other" minded and "other" centered and caring about them.

There's one final mark of maturity that I would point to you tonight and that is not only ah... the idea of stability, responsibility, purity, charity... but in chapter 6, beginning in verse 10...

By the way, speaking of charity, before I leave that... before I leave the issue of love, it not only talks about walking in love with one another in the beginning of chapter 5, he talks about how wives are to respond in love to their husbands. He talks about husbands are to love their wives. These are the evidences of maturity Christian faith. He talks about how chil... parents are to treat their children, and children are to respond to their parents. How bosses are to treat their servants and servants are to respond to their bosses. You see, this whole idea of love and charity is... is developed throughout these verses.

But then in chapter 6, beginning in verse 10, he says:

*10) And finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. 11) Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 12) For we do not wrestle with flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places. 13) Therefore take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand..*

The Bible says that as a believer in this world, you're going to be in conflict. And if you're immature and you don't grow in maturity, you're not going to be ready for battle. There's something that has to be true of every warrior and it is simply this: there has to be a quality of tenacity. I love that word *tenacity*. Stick-to-it-ness, determination, perseverance. Stand! That's what he says. Stand [tap]! And he's called us to a life of standing, staying power.

One of my favorite heroes... one of my favorite personalities in history is Winston Churchill. Ah... Churchill was a powerful leader. As you know, it is said that he mobilized the English language to turn the tide of the Second World War. And ah... he did an incredible job as a statesman... as a spokesman. Ah... and he loved words and wordsmithing. One of the things though I do love about him is just that he was a man of such incredible tenacity. Winston Churchill in many ways was the... ah... the prime minister of Great Britain during the Second World War who was like a... He was like an English bulldog. Sort of looked like one, too. But he was a bulldog.

He said a lot of interesting things. I brought a few Churchill quotes tonight I thought I'd share with you. I thought you might enjoy these. He said:

- "A fanatic is a person who can't change his mind and won't change the subject." (Ha, fanatic. Listen to this one.)
- "This report by it's very length defends itself against the risk of being read." (You ever received a report like that? Look at this one.)
- "A lie gets half way around the world before truth has a chance (not a change) to get it's pants on. Before truth has a chance to get it's pants on." (Let's look at the next one.)
- "Ending a sentence with a preposition is something up with which we will not put." (pastor laughs) [laughter] (And then one more.)
- "I'm just preparing my impromptu remarks."

I love that one! I love that one cause that's what I do all the time. I prepare. I... I'm going to start using that when I see people spending three hours in study and I walk out the door and go, "Yeah, I've just preparing my impromptu remarks." Cause that's... that's so often what I think people perceive... that those of us who preach and speak and teach do... that it's just a matter of just getting up and saying something. Can't tell you how many times I have people say, "Would you just come over and say a few words?" I'm always thinking, "Yeah, well, that's a preparation." You know, and it is! Because to say anything that matters means taking time to think about it.

And so ah... I love all of those words, but one of the great things that Churchill said and one of the great things that Churchill did, was that he said in the midst of the Second World War: "Hitler knows that he will have to break us in this isle or lose the war. If we can stand up to him, all Europe may be free. And life and the life of the world may move forward into broad sunlit uplands. But if we fail, then the whole world, including the United States, including all that we have known or cared for, will sink into the a... abyss of a new Dark Age... Let us therefore, brace ourselves to our duties and so bear ourselves, that if the British Empire and it's Commonwealth should last for a thousand years, men will look back on this day and say, 'This was their finest hour.'"

(I love that!) Live in a way that it matters. Don't be quick to throw in the towel. Be willing to stand up! Be willing to speak out! Be willing to be steadfast!

Many of you know one of his most famous speeches was that which he made at ah... the school that he had attended as a young man. It was at Harrow School, October 29, 1941, that he stood and he gave really a fairly long address, but in the midst of that address he said: "Never give in; never give in; never, never, never—in nothing great or small, large or petty—never give in except to convictions of honor and good sense. Never yield to force; never yield to the apparent overwhelming might of the enemy. Never quit."

That's what Paul says. He says, "I want you to know you're engaged in a battle. It's a real battle. It's for keeps. It's not a game." And he said, "I want to be sure that you understand that growth toward maturity has a pattern, and a part of that pattern is a tenacity that stands."

So, growth toward maturity is a process. Growth toward maturity has a pattern... stability, responsibility, purity, charity and tenacity.

The final thing that we would say is that growth toward maturity is with purpose. God wants us to grow into maturity for a purpose. And the purpose is not... I repeat that one time... the purpose is not that you and I would become spiritual trophies. God isn't interested in us shining ourselves up and sitting in the trophy case called the church so people can come by and see all of our medals of honor. What God is interested in is us becoming torches... torches whose lives according to maturity are lit with the fire of Jesus Christ and call attention to Him!

I love the fact that at the very end of the book of Ephesians that Paul was asking people to fight the fight and to pray for him, and this is what he asked them to pray... verses 19 and 20... He said:

*19) and for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the Gospel 20) for which I am an ambassador in chains that I may declare it boldly as I ought to speak.*

Paul said it's all about my life being lived to share the Gospel. It's all about being a torch. And what was true of Paul is true of all. It's true of all of us, that what God is interested in maturity is not for us to become shining trophies, but for us to be burning torches that will illumine a dark world with the hope and the message of Jesus Christ.

And that's what the Nazareth Project is all about. It's not about how big a church we can build. It's not about how shiny a Christians we can become. It's about this church living for God's purpose; we as a people becoming lights in this world. And the Nazareth Project is Jesus building up His church till He brings us home for eternity to be with Him.

And that's why every activity... everything that we do needs to be biblically based, and it needs to be a part of God's stated plan for His people. Whether it's a midweek gathering or a weekend gathering, whatever the... the role or whatever the function or the arena may be, it's all about growing up and being built up for the glory of Jesus Christ. Amen? Amen.

*Father, tonight I thank You for the challenge to grow, and I pray that You would grow us in grace, faith, and maturity. I pray You'd help us, Lord, teach us to understand and to honor the spiritual gifts that You have given to this body. And, Lord, help us individually to be good stewards of those gifts and help us, Lord, to give honor to the gifts*

*that You've given of equipping, that we might be able to grow up and build up together in Christ. Lord, I pray that what You do in us would be effective for what You do through us in life. And that we would live out the calling that You've placed upon us. And Father, I just pray tonight that ah... You would shape in us a fresh desire and yearning to grow, that You would let us each evaluate life, how we're living: Is there stability? Is there responsibility? Is there purity? Is there charity? Is there that tenacious bulldog spirit? [music begins] That needs to be there in the hard times, it needs to be there in the testing times, that we may stand and live for You. Lord, I thank You that the things that we're called to do are not of our own doing. It's by Your Spirit. So Holy Spirit of God, work in our hearts, work in our lives. Minister to us even now in these moments of prayer within community that we may grow up and build up together in life. In Jesus name I pray. Amen*

[Following the sermon Dr. McKinley leads in time of prayer]