

**[Story]** A little girl, Susie, sat in her grandpa's lap, and with the cuteness only a granddaughter could muster, she asked, "Grandpa, are you old?" "No, sweetie. What makes you say that?" Grandpa replied with a big smile. Little Susie responded, "Because, your head is coming through your hair."

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Being old or young is a very subjective word we cannot say truly whether we are old or young. However, we all know that we are getting older each day. We know for sure we are getting older: (1) When happy hour is a nap, (2) When we are on vacation and our energy runs out before our money does, (3) When it takes longer to rest than it did to get tired, and (4) When our memory is shorter and our complaining lasts longer. To echo Walt Disney's words, "Growing old is mandatory, but growing up is optional."

Today's scripture reading speaks about growing up—growing into a mature church particularly. According to Paul, growing a mature church is generally the same things that make a football team or any other sport teams successful: committed ownership, good coaching, and good teamwork. As you can tell, I have been influenced by my hubby Sung as he and I spent last two weeks-24/7-together 😊 So, bear with me.

In Ephesians 4:11-16, while Paul does not directly compare the church to a football team, he does describe it using many of those attributes that make pretty much any team or organization, successful.

**Ownership.** It is important for a football team to have an owner who is willing to foot the bill for all the expenses necessary for a winning team. Without the deep pockets, and a willingness to make a significant investment, the team will end up mired in mediocrity, or worse.

So, who owns the church? Too often we end up believing that we do; it is our church, or the pastor's church. And, as a result we look to our own resources to be successful as a church. But if we are truly a church, then we belong to Christ.

Christ is the owner of the church, and as the owner He is willing to do what is necessary to ensure that we become what He wants us to be—mature and healthy.

Paul has earlier prayed in the letter to Ephesians that we would come to understand the plan and purpose Christ has for us, the resources that are available for us, and His power that is at work in us. If we are not successful or healthy or mature as a church, it is not because the owner is tightfisted. Christ has given everything what we need already. Also, He is willing to go extra miles for us to provide more.

**Coaching.** In vs. 11-12, Paul tells us that the owner, Christ, has given the church some coaches with leadership gifts such as apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor/teachers. All too often people in the church look to the pastor as if she were hired to do the work of the church, while others might volunteer to help out a bit as if the tasks in ministry are really hers to handle. In the average church, the pastor burns out while the people in the pew rust out. The sad truth is that they are both “out.”

This is kind of like the football team expecting their coaching staff to take the field and play the game, while they stand on the sidelines and cheer them on, or criticize their failures. But Paul tells us that the role of our coaches, the pastor and the leaders of the church, is to equip or prepare us for accomplishing the work of the church. The coaches’ responsibility is to lead in the development of the game plan and then to properly train the players to execute the plan. They are equippers of the players on the field for the development of a unified, mature and Christ-like body.

**Understanding the Game Plan.** The coach, in her equipping of the people, should have a goal in mind. And she should be working from a plan designed to accomplish that goal. In vs. 12-13, Paul gives us the desired result of that game plan—the development of a unified, mature and Christ-like body. While the ways a church may use to reach that state will vary from body to body, the desired end state is the same for all of them.

The coach has responsibility for the development of the plan that will enable the team, or body, to reach that end state. But it is also important that the players on the team understand the game plan as well; if we don’t, how will we ever hit the desired end state of a unified, mature, Christ-like body? I don’t know about you, but I need to know where we are going and how I fit into the plan to get us there.

Here at Kona United Methodist Church, the desired end state of the ministry is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world through worship, outreach, and living the gospel each and every day. Particularly next year 2019, we are focusing on Hospitality, Cultural Competency, and the Ministry with Young People. This is the ministry plan for the year 2019.

With this plan, we are in the process of forming a dream team by inviting each “gifted and passionate” individuals. All of you are on the “draft” list. Please prayerfully consider playing on the field of ministry next year for becoming healthier and mature followers of Jesus Christ. It is not fun to sit the bench, game in and game out, as we know. Be active on a team—Together Each Person Achieves More.

**Team.** A mature church is about people working together as a team. On a football team it is important that each player does the job he is called to do. If even one player fails to do his job, or attempts to do someone else’s job, the whole team will suffer. It is only when each player performs his best, in his assigned role, that the whole team will be successful.

A mature church is the same way. It is only as each member of the body undertakes to be the body part that he is called to be, that the body will be most successful, healthier and mature. The result of each member being faithful to his calling is a church that is growing up, not growing older, and being built up in love.

For those who are relatively new Christians! It is my prayer that you take advantage of the different ministry opportunities we offer, both on Sundays and through the week. So, you will grow up in the faith journey you just started.

For others who are more mature or seasoned in your faith! It is my prayer that you will not be complacent where you are or become stagnant in your faith journey. I pray that you keep nurturing you and challenging you to grow more healthier and mature by helping others grow up in Christ.

It is my prayer that all of us keep growing up and become more mature as we are growing older each and every day until we are called to be “Home” in Heaven with the Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.