
SPECIAL MESSAGES

EVERY MEMBER MINISTRY

Ephesians 4:7-16

I want to read Ephesians 4, starting in verse 7. We will look at the first 16 verses, but as an introduction, allow me just to read a few verses, beginning with verse 7 of Ephesians Chapter 4.

But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...

This week and next week are two special weeks for us as a church. They are our Serve weeks. We are spending this Sunday and next Sunday just letting you know about service opportunities in the church and through the church. It's an important time for us, because we believe that to know Christ and to grow in him, there are several commitments that every person needs to make. We talk about Gather, Connect, Serve, and Grow – that it's important.

We are saved, we are brought into a relationship with God through Christ by faith in Jesus. It's a gift. We trust in him, and we receive the gift of the forgiveness of our sin, the promise of eternal life, salvation. Then what do we do as Christians? What does it look like to be a Christian and to grow? Because the moment we trust in Jesus, the scripture says we are spiritual babies. We are infants. We are just starting out and we need a lot of help. But as we grow, we mature. What are the commitments that are a part of our lives? Well, we have summarized that from scripture: Gather, Connect, Serve and Grow.

So, this is Gather. This is the party we have every Sunday morning, just coming together to hear the word of God, to worship the Lord, and to be changed in his presence. Really, this Gather – it all starts with you becoming a Christian, trusting in Jesus, following him in baptism, and committing to come to be a part of this once-a-week celebration of worship.

Connect – we want to live a life of love. We want to connect relationally. Scripture tells us that we were never intended to live in isolation, but that it's really important for us to experience, to receive, and to give love in committed relationship within the church. So we have small groups. Right now, most of our small groups are on a summer break, but you'll be

hearing more about new beginnings and new groups and opportunities for you to connect. Right now the Sunday morning course for the next four weeks is an opportunity just to come and connect and hear teaching, where the emphasis is on really applying it to your everyday life, where you interact and apply God's word to your life as you connect relationally.

Serve – that's what this Sunday and next Sunday will be all about. It's an important aspect where we live out the Christian life, giving away our lives. I'll come back to it in a second.

Then the last one is Grow, where we emphasize that we spend time with God in relationship, in prayer, in his word, privately communing, walking with God, and living a life of relationship with him – the spiritual disciplines, we would say.

Let me go back to Serve for a moment, because something very interesting happened. Adam did a great job of sharing some of the highlights of our survey results. He pointed out something that really stood out to us, and that was that, generally speaking, people that come to Riverside who commit to making this a church family – they love this church, but they are not always eager to invite other people. I don't know how that compares nationwide and if that's just how we are as people. I hope it's not: "Hey, I love my family, but I don't want anyone to meet them. That's Crazy Uncle Homer – I don't want to bring him out in public." I don't really think that's it. I think it's just that we tend to think of growth as a "me" kind of thing.

I was praying, and I don't say this to you often, but I really, very strongly sense the leading of God in my own heart. I was reading the comments and some of you actually said this: "I wish the sermons were longer. I wish the service was longer." I said, "Wow that's great! Bring it on! That's awesome!" Not everyone said that. Don't get nervous. But that, for me, indicated a hunger to grow spiritually. People want more of God. And I am telling you, just like a thunderbolt, just like a strike of lightning, however you say that, it hit me. And it was this: The Lord just said, "The growth that people long for they will find as they turn outward to give away what I have given them."

A really specific application is that it isn't just, "Okay, Brian, I've got to serve." No, no, no, no. We can all do service, but it's the mindset that there are people all around us who don't have a relationship with God. Heaven is real and hell is real and eternity is real. God has a mission for us! He has a calling for you and for me to go and share the love of God with everyone! And one step away is just to give away invite cards.

Maybe you're like me. I could say, "Alright, I stand up every Sunday morning and tell people about Jesus and how to have a relationship." But when I started looking at my day to day life, I said, "How much do I really do that?" And I renewed a commitment. In fact, I repented and said, "Lord, this isn't the priority that it should be." Immediately, that 44% of anxiety? I must have checked anxiety in my survey, Adam. I had some anxiety.

Now, if I've got a little bit of anxiety on this issue, I have to believe I'm not alone. You know, "Will I have time? How will it be received? Will I say the right thing?" And this is what helped me so much. I saw the promise in scripture. I preached a sermon on this topic called "Greater Works" about five or six weeks ago. If this is something for you, I encourage you to go check out that message. It was so clear in scripture that Jesus promised us that if we will ask him, he will do this through us. This is his will.

The very first time he saw his disciples and called his apostles, he said, "Follow me and...I will make you fishers of men." No matter how long you've known the Lord, this is something God wants to be a part of your life. The very last thing Jesus said to his disciples before he ascended was, "Go, therefore, and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you."

From beginning to end, God desires for you to be sharing who he is and what he has done in your life with other people. It's not a sales thing. It's not some high pressure issue. It's being natural, being who you are in Jesus -- that aspect. Maybe I could say that it's turning outward all the way, to where you are thinking about people who don't know God at all, and asking, "How can I be part of a church that is reaching them?" The exciting part about it for me was that God was saying the growth that some are hungering for is going to be realized in a whole new way when they get out of their comfort zone and allow God to put faith in their hearts for that.

So, that's the context for these next two Sundays. I want you to think in terms of Serve, but not just serve so we can do programs and activities. Serve so that we can reach people, so that we can be a church that is reaching people. And today, on the first of those two Sundays, we are doing something very special. We are ordaining elders. We are ordaining three men, and I'm going to ask those men with their wives to come sit right here on the front row.

Navin Gupta and his wife Regina, if you would come sit up here. Regina loves the spotlight, so just for you, Regina, we are going to ask you to come sit up here on the front row. I want you to see these individuals. I'll explain more in a second. Tim and Pam Smith – yeah, come on, guys. Tim is always easy to describe as the tallest guy in the church. And Jesse and Melanie Morales – these three men will be ordained to the office of elder.

Milan and Kelly Stefanovic are over here. Milan served the last three years as a provisional elder. In the last few months he stepped out and said that because of some personal commitments it wasn't the best time for him to keep going forward. But I want you to know he wasn't disqualified. We didn't wake up one day and say, "What were we thinking? He's no longer elder material." So thank you, Milan and Kelly, for your service. These individuals have served a long provisional period. Years is not an exaggeration.

The elders' main responsibility before God is to govern the church. They are the final decision-making body of the church. So after today we will have five ordained elders: Adam, myself, and these three men. They have been governing and functioning in that role during this provisional period. I won't take you through the history of how we got down to a low number, but we did and there's a legitimate explanation. If you want it, you can see Adam Greenfield later and he'll tell you everything you need to know. In fact, if you have any question about anything, just see Adam Greenfield. Okay, are you with me?

I am not the final decision-maker. I am one amongst a group. There are five of us. I don't have 51%. I am one in five. I lead that group, but we govern in plurality. My life, Adam's life – we are submitted to one another. It is not unusual for these men to tell me I'm wrong, to correct me, and to fail to see the wisdom that I'm offering on many occasions. I have had individuals say, "Well, you know, pastors just surround themselves with yes men," to which I say, "Could you send them my way? Because I'd like one or two to serve on the eldership." Love you guys.

So my message today sets a context for that, but it's not really to these men. It's to us as a church family. It's a very important message and I'm taking my time preparing the soil in setting up the context. I'm saying to you that service is important. It's not just important from a practical sense. There's a spiritual issue. We are ordaining these men into a role of service. Understanding their role and your role will be tremendously helpful, so this is the passage that I want to use to do that.

In order for us to progress here, we have to unlearn something, and that probably is the greatest challenge of today's message. In order to teach what needs to be taught, many of us have to unlearn something. There is this idea that pastors and other key leaders such as elders do the work of the ministry. That is not a biblical concept. The truth scripturally is that every Christian does the work of the ministry and that leaders equip everyone. They are part of an equipping process. I want to say it like this: Leaders are a gift from God, not to do the ministry for you, but to get you ready to minister. Did you get that?

If your idea is, "Okay, I come, my role in the church is to fill a seat, I give a little bit of money, I give a lot of money," (however you understand that). "Maybe I volunteer a little bit. But the real ministry happens from Brian and Adam and maybe a few other people." That is not a biblical perspective. That is not what the bible teaches. It's not what happened in the early church. It's not what is recorded in the book of Acts. Though your leaders are important and have an important role, you are the key to the success of this church. Yes, we need great leaders, but we need great leaders and we need great people, and everyone is called to minister. So we have to unlearn this idea that there are a few specialists that really do the work of the ministry.

What I'd like to do is just jump into this passage and break it down so that you'll see those truths. What Paul is describing here in verses 1 through 16 is healthy, mature church life. I just read a little bit about leadership in the church and I want to go back and start in verse 1 and break it down for you. Here's what he says in these verses. He basically tells us, "You know what? Here's what I want you to do. I want you to be united. I want you to be one body. Riverside, I want you to be one, and united. Every single person has a gift, and every single person has a call on their life and a role to play. A healthy church will look like, in unity, everyone doing their individual role as the leaders equip each member to do that. It's the whole idea that you have a gift from God. You have a call from God.

I am called and gifted to do what I do, and I find sometimes when I get in other settings I'm just not effective. Right now there is a kids' church going on. If you send me over and say, "Brian, you are in charge of that kids' church," it might go well for a couple of Sundays, but very quickly I will exhaust my ability and you will see it. I believe that we don't need to recruit people into positions. We just need to help those people discover what it is they are gifted to do and called to do and get them into those spots. In fact, the teaching of this passage and 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12 is that Jesus decides what your gift is and he gifts his body perfectly. He puts in this church what he needs in order for this church to be healthy.

So I would say to you that if you don't like children, we don't really want you in the children's ministry. Maybe there's a root problem, like you really dislike children. I don't know. We'll talk about that. Let's just talk about our children's ministry for a moment. It doesn't mean you have to be called to be a teacher to spend 10 hours a day with children in order to be in the children's ministry. In fact, the great thing about it is that it's kind of like grandparenting. You know, you're over there for an hour or two, you enjoy them, and then you leave them. You give them back.

But there is a sense that though there's an element of sacrifice -- "I'm going to serve" -- there is a companion truth here. You are gifted. You are called to do this. That's what Paul teaches here and elsewhere. And he tells the leaders: You equip people and ready them to serve.

Let's break it down. I'm going to break the passage down, verses 1 through 16, into three truths. The first point is this:

I. Unity is natural in Christ.

He wants a healthy body, and part of that (and this theme runs throughout all 16 verses) is that we are united. We are one. God dislikes disunity. It doesn't mean you have to always agree. It doesn't mean you can't express disagreement. Not at all. That's not the point. But he tells us in these verses that unity is natural in the Spirit of God, that the Spirit of God unites our hearts.

Let's look at these verses. "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called..." hold your finger right there, okay? I hope you're following along in the scripture because it will help you if you see it. Paul has been teaching for three chapters about doctrine and the church and how we are saved and come into a relationship with God -- that Jesus Christ has paid the penalty for our sin, and that you cannot earn that. It is a gift. It is the grace of God, and it is just received by trusting in Jesus. God promises you eternal life and forgiveness of sin if you will trust in Jesus Christ. Nothing you can do will earn that and nothing you have done will keep you from that if you will trust in him, confessing your sin and receiving forgiveness by faith.

Now, after teaching that for three chapters, he starts to tell us how to live as Christians. He wants us to walk, to daily live in a way that is commensurate with that, that's worthy of what God has done in our lives. Verse 2:

...with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

He gives us these "ones," these seven "ones," and his point is simple. God is one. There is only one way for you to get saved. There is only one Holy Spirit that lives in you. There is only one Jesus that can save you. There aren't a whole lot of ways to be a Christian. There aren't a whole lot of different paths to get to God. There's one. There's one church. He is emphasizing the oneness that we all share in common.

You know, we just went through a really tumultuous time with the election, and in some ways it still carries on. In the public arena there is so much division. We find that even amongst Christians there is not always agreement on how to respond to key issues and who to vote for. It may just be me, but it seems like in some ways it's more divisive than ever. But you know what? That which we have in common, the Jesus that we share, is greater than the differences we might have, even politically. I need an Amen here. I need to know that you are still with me. I need to know that you are not dividing up into Republican and Democrat right now, and everything else. It's true, right? Jesus unites us. I'm not for a minute saying those issues aren't important, but Paul is making the point that if the Holy Spirit is in us, unity should be natural. It's unnatural for us to be divided.

I want to give you an application before I leave this first point, because I've observed something that happens in counseling. This hasn't happened recently. This isn't about anyone here. Don't start looking around. But over the years, when I've counseled couples in marriage, men have said one thing to me frequently: "I just want peace. I just want peace in my home." Now, don't raise your hand, but some of you men have said that, haven't you? I'm not saying women don't

want peace. There's no gender statement here. Please, if you have a question, see Adam Greenfield. He'll explain to you our position on all matters related to gender.

I've just observed this, okay? And, men, I just thought it might be helpful – I'm going to give you a prescription for peace in your home. Here it is: Humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another in love. Can I get an Amen from somebody? The ladies are saying: "Yeah! Tell him!" Okay, that goes for men and women, husbands and wives.

Here's what Paul is saying: You know why we have disunity? Because it's just too much about you. Step back. Humble yourself. Gentleness, not harshness. Forbearance, rather than "I'm done. I'm done with you. You've disappointed me. This is it. This is the last time." Right? We experience that relationally. It's just easier in the church to give up. It's a little tougher when you live with the person. But we find a way to do that too, don't we? Yeah, we do. Here's what happens. Here is good marriage counseling: Just act like Christians. Just start by being Christian with one another and it will help you, a lot. Paul writes that our eagerness to maintain the unity of the Spirit, which is natural, is expressed through these four virtues of humility, gentleness, patience, and bearing with one another in love.

Okay, the second point is this:

II. Jesus gives gifts to make the body healthy.

He gives every person gifts, grace, in order to make the body healthy. We read these verses, verses 7 through 12, and I want to explain what we read, because it's a little confusing. The Apostle Paul is borrowing here from Psalm 68. The image is about a king who goes out to battle. He conquers, he leads all of his captives in a long line, and he takes a bunch of gifts – the bounty, the spoils of his victory. In Psalm 68, specifically, the picture is that the conquering king represents God, who is ascending in Zion. He is going up Mount Zion, the holy mountain of God, the holy city of God. He has conquered, he is ascending, and he's got all these gifts. He's leading the host of captives.

Paul quotes that to say that's what Jesus has done. When he ascended he gave a bunch of gifts. Then he explains it. He says, "Well, in order for him to ascend, he had to descend. He left heaven. He came to earth. Here on earth he lived a perfect life and he made a way for us to get right with God. He offered himself to pay the penalty for our sin on the cross. And he took some captives. He took death captive. He took sin captive. Right? And he has some gifts to give away.

So Jesus is the victor. At tremendous cost and sacrifice, he descended. His love for you is immense! He doesn't want you to die and to perish. He is offering to you the gift of life. Listen, when that happens, you say, "I trust in Jesus! I want to share in that bounty. I want to receive the gift of eternal life." This is what he says, "I love you, and I've got work for you to do. Come on! And here's a gift. You – here's this gift, here's this gift, here's this gift."

In scripture there are almost 30 gifts that are listed in the various passages. I don't think for a minute that that's comprehensive. I think it's just a representation of some of the gifts that the Spirit of God gives us so that we can do the work of God. In this passage it's a unique listing, because the gifts are leaders in the church. These men are a gift to you. They are not here to do the work for you, but to get you ready to use your gift more effectively.

And so, the emphasis in these verses – you heard it perhaps as I read it – verse 7: “But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.” You are gifted. And then verses 11 and 12: “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...” Equipping so that others can do the work of the ministry, so that the body of Christ will be healthy.

Let me just say this before I end the second point and move to the last point. I am emphasizing to you that we have to unlearn something so we can learn something. We have to unlearn the idea that the church really has this professional class and they are the ones that do the real ministry. That's not true. That's not a correct understanding of how leadership works in the body. In fact, if you read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, Jesus emphasized that we don't use titles, don't use layers, don't talk about levels, don't promote men and women into these places of celebrity status, or even just this hierarchy. No, no, no, no. We are all servants of God, and greatness in my kingdom is all about serving, and my leaders are to be servants. Forgive me, Christians, if I've not modeled that or if we have not done that well, or if that has not been your experience in church life, but that is the scripture. Amen? It is the scripture.

If you want to call me Pastor Brian, you can call me Pastor Brian. We generally say not to use titles, but you're not going to be in trouble if you say it, I promise. You won't be in trouble, but we don't insist on it. We don't stress it. We don't emphasize it. Why? Because it's just a small step until we get to this place: “Well, you know, it's the pastors who do the real work of the ministry.” No. No. It's you. It's all of us.

Alright, third point.

III. Maturity happens when every person is working properly.

Let's just read it. It's just a few verses and it will complete the passage for us. Picking up in verse 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, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

Hold your finger right there before verse 15. Do you see that? He is describing now not just unity, but unity that's progressing in maturity. We are thinking correctly about truth and doctrine. We're not: Something new comes along and

pushes us over here, and we are blown here, and we have a trial and we fall apart. No, we are all walking together, helping one another, maturing together in Jesus Christ. Our leaders are equipping us. Everyone is doing their own part.

Verse 15:

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, (look at this) when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that (look at the language) it builds itself up in love.

Isn't that good? Do you see? I don't even have to break the passage down. It's saturated with: We keep our eyes on Christ. It's all about him. He gives us the strength we need. Everyone has a part to play. We are all doing it. We are building one another up. It's not just that the pastors or the key teachers or leaders build you up. No, we are speaking to one another. We are connecting relationally. We are reaching new people. We are bringing them. We are sharing. We are building others up in Christ. And that last phrase is really key, right? Each part is working properly. That's a healthy body, right? Don't you want every part of your body to work? That's what God wants for his church and he has placed every part properly.

Now, here's the takeaway for you. Tell God you're ready. Tell God you're available. And he will use your leaders, but he will get you going in a whole new way. Take the borders off and say, "God, I'm here. I'm ready."

I struggled to know if I was called to do what I'm doing. It was a real struggle for me. And one day, when I was in Europe backpacking, a single man, God spoke to me. It was one of the clearest times God ever spoke to me. He said, "Brian, I want you to do three things. I'm calling you into the pastoral ministry. Eventually you'll be responsible for leading, but at first I want you to work with small groups, work with youth, and do preaching and teaching. This will be your first step in full-time ministry."

I had one year left in seminary. I came home, proposed to Beth, and I'm finishing out that first year. I'm waiting, I'm waiting, I'm waiting. I have no idea where I'm going to go. I said, "Lord, I will go anywhere you send me. There's only one place I won't go. I won't go to my home church. I don't want to go to Riverside because..." You see where this ends, don't you? I didn't want to go to Riverside because I had been in a church there in Texas where it was a father/son team, and it didn't go well. The son wasn't accepted. It was a disaster and there was heavy criticism toward that father/son team. So I didn't want to be in a position where people are saying, "He's not really called. He's just here because his dad is here."

On top of that (you won't know this – this is a little known fact in history) this church was going to hire my brother before it hired me. You got the best of the two brothers, and when you see my brother you tell him that. They were going to

hire my brother a few years earlier and the church leadership at that time said, “We don’t want him because his dad is here and that won’t be healthy.” And I’ve got to tell you, I agreed with that. So I said, “God, there’s one place I won’t go. Anywhere else you send me – I’m not sure Beth will come – but we’ll go. I think she will. She said she will.”

So then, I’m almost through the seminary and I’m about ready to get married. We are engaged now, and I get a call from Keith Wittenmyer, who was the director of a committee here. He said, “Brian, we believe you are supposed to come be part of our staff. We need a guy who will do three things. We need a guy who will work with small groups, who will work with youth, and who will preach and teach.” I said, “I’m not available. I don’t know.” I did not say that. It was out of nowhere, and at the exact moment I received an offer from the church I was at in Texas. It was a bigger church. It was an exploding church. It was in the natural a greater opportunity. I knew God was directing me here.

I’m telling you this story to say this: Say yes to God! I’ve been here 30 years. You can’t get rid of me now! I love it here! I love what God is doing. I love how this church fits with me and the call of God on my life. I can get up in the morning and say, “I am where I belong in the scheme of God, in the plan of God.”

God wants to do that in your life. But don’t tell him what part of the body you are. Just say yes. Say yes to him and watch what he will do. But, you’ve got to unlearn this bad thinking that says, “Well, the real ministry is reserved for other people.” No, God wants to change lives through you. He wants to change the world through you.

Alright, here’s what we’re going to do. We are going to end the service by ordaining these men. What that means is that we are going to pray for them. Adam and I are going to lay hands on them and send them out. We had a couple of elders that were in this church who are still here, but not serving. They are both out of town today, or they would be joining us in this moment.

Let me just say this before we do that. If you want to know more about a relationship with Jesus Christ, put your name and a way to contact you on one of those response cards in front of you, or come back into the café afterward. Stefan will be there. Some of us will be there. We want to talk to you about your relationship with God.

In just a moment, I’m going to ask these men to come and kneel here and we are going to anoint them with oil. Scripture tells us that that is symbolic of the Holy Spirit touching them, imparting to them, and we are going to pray for them. I’m going to ask the worship team to go ahead and come up and get ready to help us do that. But I want to explain what’s going to happen in the next five minutes. This will be the close of our service. Though it doesn’t take a long time, it’s very important and I want to explain it to you. The Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 1 spoke to his son in the Lord. He said, “You have gifts that are in you through the laying on of my hands.”

