

# Gifted for Growth

Ephesians 4:7-16

**Key Text: Ephesians 4:7-16**

<sup>7</sup> But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. <sup>8</sup>

Therefore it says,

“When he ascended on high he led a host of captives,  
and he gave gifts to men.”

<sup>9</sup> (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? <sup>10</sup> He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) <sup>11</sup> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup> 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, <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

## Introduction

Some time ago, I came across an article ranking some of the most painful injuries a football player could experience (in his opinion). I'm not sure how you become qualified to write an article like that—do you have to experience them all? Nonetheless, it was interesting. Broken ribs came in at number eight. One little broken rib can be incredibly painful. Anyone that's broken a rib can tell you: since your lungs push on your ribs, it hurts literally all the time. Breathing, laughing, speaking, coughing—you name it. All from one little rib. Any guesses as to what was at the top of the list? A broken femur! He called it the worst of all possible bone fractures. But reading the article gave me more empathy for a childhood friend who shattered his femur on a school snow skiing trip. He hit a tree going down a black diamond course. I was on the chairlift and I remember hearing the crack echo down the ski slope.

And one broken bone is so detrimental to the effectiveness of the entire body, isn't it? Imagine how crazy it would be if my friend who shattered his femur would have said, “It's just one bone. I have 205 other ones that are fine. I'm *healthy*. Do I really *need* to address my broken femur?” Obviously, no one's going to say that, even if it's a little broken rib. Why? Because one of the parts of your body affects the rest of your body. If your whole body is healthy, you're effective. But if you get injured, or even get sick, productivity goes down in a hurry. That's because every part of your body serves a purpose. And if one part is sick or broken, you need it

on the mend as quickly as possible, to get it functioning again, so that you can get about your life.

What we're going to see in Ephesians 4 is that the same is true in the church, Christ's body. Every single one of you, every single member of this church is *indispensable* to the growth of this body. At your conversion, Christ not only saved you, as glorious as that is. But he also *gifted* you specifically and individually, because he intends to use you to help this church *grow* to full maturity. But the reality is that many in the church are sometimes more like a broken bone than a healthy one. We're still riddled with sin, or we're unsure exactly how to be useful, or we're just hesitant to really commit in relationships to others. We need mending. And that's where the leaders come in. Paul's going to tell us in this passage that Christ has even supplied what we need to be mended: he's given the body leaders to equip the saints for ministry usefulness. And, as the body is mended, and each part is working in the ways Christ has gifted it to work, Paul says the body will build itself up. It'll grow. It will accomplish Christ's mission on earth. Unbelievers will be converted. Believers will be transformed. And God's wisdom will be put on display for the entire universe to see, as we believe and follow what Paul says here in Ephesians 4.

The passage is a little complex, but the message is pretty simple: we've been gifted to grow. Paul is basically showing us that Christ intends every single one of us to be vitally connected, growing and serving in the church. We can summarize Paul's argument in three statements (which will be our outline moving forward). (1) *Christ gifts the body* in fulfillment of Scripture (4:7-10). The church has been richly supplied with gifts from Christ, and he intends us to use them to grow the body. But we also need to become healthy so we can use these gifts effectively. So, (2) Christ also gives us *leaders who equip the body*. They equip us for usefulness and that leads to growing maturity (4:11-15). And finally, (3) *the body grows the body* as we exercise our gifts (4:16). And the cycle continues! Broken femurs are mended and become even stronger than before, and the body performs as it was designed to by Christ.

### 1. Christ Gifts the Body in Fulfillment of Scripture (4:7-10).

<sup>7</sup> But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. <sup>8</sup>

Therefore it says,

“When he ascended on high he led a host of captives,  
and he gave gifts to men.”

<sup>9</sup> (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? <sup>10</sup> He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)

Paul says Christ himself has given each one of us 'grace,' and he's done it in fulfillment of Scripture. There's a lot here in these verses, so let's talk through what Paul means when he says Christ has given grace to the body. Then we'll come back at the end and look at how it's in fulfillment of Scripture.

## Christ Gifts the Body (4:7)

<sup>7</sup> But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

I'm sure if you're like me, you might have a number of questions as you read those verses. One of the first things we might ask is, **what does grace mean here?** Paul uses this language of grace in other letters for spiritual gifts. We could say it here as 'grace for ministry,' or 'grace-gifts.' These are specific gifts given to you by Christ that he expects you to use for the edification of the church.

But that raises another question: **why doesn't he just call them gifts?** Well, he will in the next verse, but for now, he calls them grace. Why? Because your spiritual gifts are just that, a gracious gift. They are manifestations of God's grace. The point is they didn't originate with you. God *gave* them to you freely. You can't brag about them. Any of your abilities to build any other Christian up in the faith is totally otherworldly, from Christ himself. That's amazing and humbling and the same time, isn't it?

**But what exactly are these gifts?** We haven't read it yet, but down in verse 11, he gives a few examples: apostleship, prophecy, evangelism, shepherding and teaching. Now, those aren't all the gifts by a long stretch. It's a just a select grouping of gifts. He highlights those particular gifts because there's something that connects all of them together: they are *word-based gifts* that Christ has given to help equip the rest of the church in its gifts. But more on that tonight. Here Paul doesn't give any other examples of the gifts beyond those. But, in other places in Scripture, Paul does give some samples: Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:7-10; 12:28. Here are some:

- **Helping/Serving** – Believers who thrive in assisting others. They typically thrive when they are tasked to help carry something out.
- **Leading/administration** – Believers who excel at guiding others, charting a path forward and compelling others to follow by example.
- **Exhortation** – Believers who excel at urging and encouraging others in the truth, as well as motivating them to live accordingly.
- **Giving** – Believers who thrive on being generous with material possessions to meet needs and bless others.
- **Mercy** – Believers who excel in ministering to and encouraging those who are hurting or suffering. We typically describe these kinds of folks as those with huge and tender hearts, who empathize quickly with the plight of others.

- **Discernment** – Believers who excel in distinguishing between what is true and false. They typically see issues clearly and can speak to them with clarity as well, thus edifying the church.
- **Faith** – Believers with extraordinary faith, who can compel others who may be weak in faith to, by their example, trust the Lord.
- **Healing/Miracles** – Believers who are gifted to heal and perform miracles with some kind of regularity. We believe these gifts have ceased after the apostles' era, but that doesn't mean the Lord still can't heal or work miracles as he sees fit.
- **Tongues and interpretation of tongues** – It appears that the gift of tongues is the ability to speak in other languages, with the gift of interpretation being just that: the ability to interpret the message of that other language for the edification of the congregation. We also believe the gift of tongues has ceased after the first century.

We'll talk through the other gifts Paul describes in verse 11 tonight. For now, just keep in mind that no list of gifts is exhaustive. There are almost endless ways to be used by God for the good of others. But you may still be a little uncertain, and wondering...

**How do I know I have one?** Notice how explicit Paul is in v. 7. He says that he says each one of us has been graced with gifts. No one is excluded. Even if you have no clue how the Lord could use you, if you are a believer this morning, you have been gifted according to this text. It was part of your salvation package. You have been outfitted by Christ himself to help others. That means you are indispensable to this body at TBC by Christ's very design. It displeases our Lord when we're just spectators in his church. Everyone is designed by him to be an active participant. If you aren't actively participating, the church isn't as healthy as God intends it to be! Christ has given you a free grace-gift and he expects you to max it out for his glory and the good of others!

And we've got to know this little truth. Why? Because serving is often tough, relating to others is messy business, and it's easy to justify *not doing*. We are tempted to stay on the fringe and not really get involved, because after all, we're just tired. Or we were hurt at a previous ministry. Or we just don't have the energy we used to. Or we don't want to become overcommitted and sacrifice too much of our time. What are we paying these pastors for anyway? Don't we call them ministers because they're supposed to do all the ministry? So, it's very easy to justify staying on the sidelines. We've got to know that the Christ who saved us also gifted us and intends us to max it out for his glory in the church.

**How do I figure out what I have?** I wouldn't necessarily suggest taking some kind of spiritual gifts test or inventory. Let's not overcomplicate this. Have you ever asked those closest to you to give you feedback on where you seem to excel in church life? Family, friends and pastors will often be able to help you identify where the Lord is using you. Or how about this: when you think of loving people in the church, what do you instantly visualize? If I said to you,

“Go love that person right there,” what would you do? What manifestations of love do you naturally gravitate toward? Often our God-given gifts emerge when we’re seeking to love others. The helper will most naturally love someone, not by exhorting them in truth, but by discerning and meeting practical needs. It doesn’t mean they can’t exhort or shouldn’t exhort (in fact, we should all be encouraging even if we don’t necessarily have that gift, right?). Exhortation just won’t be as natural for them as helping. So, what I tell folks who are unsure about their gifts is to just immerse yourself in seeking to love and serve the people of Timberlake.

**How can I get started serving?** When we ask that question, we often envisioning an official position of some kind, a particular post if you will in the church (guitar player for the music team, or hospitality coordinator, or greeter, etc.)? Positions are incredibly important. But a temptation here is to think that you can only serve if you have something official—formal position. But I like to try to get people thinking beyond the formal, to the thousands of informal ways we can serve each other, and to realize that’s just as important.

Informally, at the most basic level, get involved in the lives of others in the body. Get to know people in your Sunday school class or a ministry that you’re involved in. (Obviously if you’re not involved in anything beyond attending a corporate service, you need to be!) Be attentive to the needs of others and find ways to meet those needs. Befriend someone, get to know them, and seek to be an encouragement to them. Younger saints, take initiative and meet an older saint, then find a way to help them during the week. Those with homes, invite others over for meals to get to know them and find ways you can pray for them. You don’t need a church leader to make that happen for you. That’s informal, and I can guarantee that if you’re pursuing others to really love them, you will inevitably be using your gifts.

On the more formal side, talk to some folks who you notice are very involved and ask them what the needs are of the church (or even for ways you could help them!). To give you a head start, I polled the staff this week and asked about some of our most pressing formal needs. Children’s ministry? You bet. The medical team could also use folks. The children’s ministry could use a few more volunteers. The greeter team is in need. Children’s ministry could use some help right now. Also, we need ushers, and maybe a few more children’s ministry workers.

So, pray to be used, then find an area that needs you and seek to avail yourself in meeting that need. God will eventually help you see where he has gifted you, and how you can be most useful. You’ll find others affirming you in your gifts, and you’ll see the Lord eventually producing fruit in and through you when you do them. And even if you serve somewhere you’re not exactly “gifted,” it’s still beneficial to the church. And remember: your gifts aren’t about you. They are given to you for the sake of others, for *their edification*. We don’t serve simply to get personal gratification, glory for ourselves, or for CSER *only* if you’re a college student. We serve to bless and benefit others, and to cause others to grow for the glory of God.

**What if I am insecure about my gifts, or just unsure if I’ll really be a help (4:7)?** I want you to notice one more little phrase in verse 7. Paul says you’ve been gifted “according to the measure of the gift of Christ.” This means that Christ has sovereignly determined (1) what kinds

of gifts you should have and (2) how much of it you should have. As Pastor Bryan often says, Christ has gifted you and limited you in his infinite wisdom. We should trust he knows what he's doing, even if we aren't completely sure what our gifts are.

Sometimes, when we see others being extremely useful, we fall prey to what's been called gift envy. We wish God had made us like others in the body who seem so useful to him, while ignoring how he has gifted us, and making the most of it. Or we put pressure on ourselves to be just like someone else, when God may not have given you those particular strengths. Imagine saying to Christ, "I don't like the grace you've given me. I'd be more useful to you with a different set of gifts." May we never say that to the Lord of the church, who knows exactly how we will be most useful to him, and has outfitted every one of us particularly with his grace to make it happen.

The fact that Christ has measured out our gifting also implies that God has limited us. He chose to give you this, and *not that*. Christ hasn't given the pastors all the gifts, and the rest of the members only one. We are all limited by design. That's because God has structured the church in such a way to be interdependent. As we'll see tonight, growth in the church happens when every single member is working together (cf. 4:16). This means you need the gifts of others for your growth, and others need you to use your gifts for theirs. If you're not involved in the lives of others at TBC, you're actually weakening our church; we're walking with a limp because of your inactivity. There are people who are limited in our congregation, and *they need your gifts* to more fully develop into the image of Christ. This is incredible motivation to serve, isn't it?

Now, there is a reality that, when we are less mature, we are less useful in our gifts. We're like the fractured bone. If that's you, don't be discouraged. The incredible thing is that God has made provision for this in the church. Later, we're going to look at how God has gifted leaders to the church to help you, to mend you, to help you grow up to maturity and be a more useful gift. But more on that below. Right now, just take heart, and know that if God has saved you, his intention is to also transform you over time and use you more and more as you grow.

So, we've been given ministry grace by Christ, but that's not all Paul says about it. He says this gifting is actually in fulfillment of the Old Testament.

### **In Fulfillment of Scripture (4:8-10)**

<sup>8</sup> Therefore it says,  
"When he ascended on high he led a host of captives,  
and he gave gifts to men."

<sup>9</sup> (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? <sup>10</sup> He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)

Paul loosely quotes here from Psalm 68:18. He's essentially saying that this Psalm was written, ultimately, about the event he just spoke about, this event where Christ poured out gifts on all of us. So, according to Paul, this Psalm is functioning prophetically. It ultimately looked to the ascension of Christ, Paul says.

But if we were to go back to the Psalm and check it out, it would appear that the Psalm *isn't about Christ*, per say, but about the Lord, Yahweh, ascending the mountain of Jerusalem. The Psalm poetically tells the story of God's rescue of Israel from Egypt, their conquest of Canaan, and Yahweh's ascent to Jerusalem to make it his dwelling place. That's the original reference to the phrase in our text, "when he ascended on high" with on high being Jerusalem.

In this ascent to Jerusalem, Yahweh, "led a host of captives," meaning he took prisoners of war (through King David). It's likely a poetic reference to all the enemies of Israel conquered by David and previous leaders of Israel. Then, the Psalm text says, Yahweh *received* gifts from men. This is a reference to the contributions made by Israel for the building of the temple in Solomon's day.

There's a prophetic pattern at play. First, an ascent of Yahweh to rule in victory over his enemies. And second, receiving gifts for the building of the temple. The Psalm itself ends with an expectation of a future work of God, cast in this same pattern. Paul, here in Ephesians 4, sees it fulfilled typologically in the ministry of Jesus. Paul interprets the one who ascended as *Jesus himself*. He ascended in victory over his enemies, the hostile powers described in Ephesians, by virtue of his death.

This is exactly how Paul goes on to explain the meaning of the quote (4:9-10). Jesus, as the one who ascended in glory to heaven over his enemies, is the same one who first descended in death to accomplish the victory. Some people have interpreted this text to mean that Christ descended into hades or Sheol and led out all the OT saints. But I don't think that's what Paul's referencing. It most naturally means his descent to the *grave* by way of the cross (cf. 1:20).

But the incredible point, especially in this context, is that just like Yahweh *received gifts* for the building of a physical temple, now the Lord Jesus *gives gifts* for the building of his end-time temple, the church. And in fact, the way Paul quotes this text, he's saying that Jesus' ascension and his bestowal of spiritual gifts is *the* ultimate and climatic fulfillment of the pattern of Psalm 68.

Why do I say all this? (If I've lost you with the Psalm 68 info, please key back in now.) I took you through that because I want to underscore something glorious. When you exercise your gift, when you serve the body, when you lay your life down for the good of others, *you are helping build the eschatological temple*. That's what Paul wants us to see. He told us back in chapter two that now, in Christ, we are growing into a holy temple in the Lord and are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit (2:21-22). Did you hear that language? The church *is* this predicted temple, where God lives and will live forever, and we get the privilege of being gifted to build it up! When you serve, you are fulfilling promises made to the saints

millennia ago. You are participating in the most climatic pattern of all of Scripture. What a privilege!

Paul knows we *need* to be reminded of this. This has to be a conviction for us. If we're honest, serving doesn't always *feel* like a privilege, does it? Needs are just that—needs! Meeting needs takes energy, time, thoughtfulness, intentionality and resources. And if we're not careful, we can lose this perspective, we can lose sight of the bigger vision of why we're serving. And we can even lose sight of what we're seeking to accomplish when we serve. It's all too easy to get in the grind of ministry—of serving your family, or your Sunday school class, or the babies in nursery—and think the mission is to just keep the ministry machine going day after day. But it's far more glorious than we realize. So actively call this to mind the next time you spread mulch at a church workday or spend some extra hours helping a church member work through an issue in their lives. You're fulfilling Scripture as you build the new temple. What an incredible and glorious mercy. We are profoundly *privileged to serve*.

As incredible as all this is, there's a stark reality we often bump up against. We still battle with sin, and we're still easily deceived. Even though we've been given incredible gifts by Christ, we often don't use them because we're consumed with ourselves. We don't see needs because we're not looking for them. Or, we can't possibly think about helping others because we know we're trapped in sin. How can we help others get a speck out of their eye when we have a log in ours? We feel useless and broken and totally unable to help anyone. Or, we feel our immaturity and inexperience, and we're afraid that, if we jump into serving and meeting needs, we'll mess something up. These are very realistic obstacles that stand in the way to fulfilling everything we talked about this morning, very real roadblocks to being useful in the body. Satan would love nothing more than to keep us there, rendering us ineffective in this great spiritual battle we find ourselves in every day (see Eph. 6).

But the beauty of this passage, and of God's design of the church, is that he has made provision for these weaknesses. God knows we are frail and inexperienced. He knows our propensity toward deception. He's a professional mender of human beings, and a perfect renovator of his new humanity. So, as Paul continues his argument in this passage, we're going to see that God has given specific people to the church to help each of the members grow up and become useful.

## 2. Leaders Equip the Body for Usefulness unto Maturity (4:11-15).

<sup>11</sup> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup> 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, <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is



equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

### The Gift of Leadership (4:11)

<sup>11</sup> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers...

Let's unpack each of these leaders to see exactly how God intends them as *gifts* to you. Paul lists apostles first. What exactly is Paul talking about here? In the NT, there are really two ways that 'apostle' is used. One is in a generic sense, someone that is sent on behalf of another (think lowercase-a apostle). But there's also a technical sense, a capital-A apostle, like the Twelve plus Paul. They are the official reps of Christ, having witnessed him post-resurrection and bearing his authority on earth after his ascension. In the first sense of apostle, as a sent one, we still send people out today. But in the second sense, there are no more apostles, i.e. official representatives, after the Twelve plus Paul (more on this in a minute).

Right after 'apostles,' the next gift described is 'prophets.' Is he talking about the prophets under the old covenant or new? We know he's talking about new covenant prophets, since they are a gift that Christ has given to his church after his ascension. When you look at the data of the NT<sup>1</sup>, what makes someone a prophet is that they received direct revelation from God for the encouragement or direction of a local congregation. They also taught and encouraged the church, and thus are closely associated with the teachers, although they are different (cf. Acts 13:1; 15:32). What sets them apart is the reception of revelation, making them similar to Apostles.

As we pan out in the letter of Ephesians, Paul has already given us the data we need to understand these two gifted people. Paul views them together as *foundational* for the church (read 2:20). This word indicates they are unique to the building of this end time temple. How are they foundational, in what sense? They received direct revelation from God for the founding of the church. It's referred to as the "apostles' doctrine" or "teaching" in Acts 2:42. The prophets were also included in this, particularly by even writing it down in document form to be studied and taught in local congregations (see Eph. 3:3-7). This means they were foundational in that they provide the inspired new covenant revelation, which was preserved for us in our New Testament. Paul and the other New Testament authors expected their writings to be received as Scripture: to be read aloud to the churches, to be copied, circulated, studied, taught, meditated upon, and applied in the local church.

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<sup>1</sup> For the description of prophets in action, see Acts 11:27-30; 13:1; 15:32; 21:10 (cf. Luke 2:36). For the act of prophesying see Acts 2:17-18; 19:6; 21:9.

Although we would argue that this foundational role is over,<sup>2</sup> and that apostles and prophets do not continue today in the church, we are still being fundamentally edified by the apostles and prophets as we study and apply the revelation they supplied to us. In other words, they are still gifts to us for our equipping via the Scriptures they penned.

The next gifted person on the list is the 'evangelist.' What is this person's role? There's not a lot about this kind of gifting in the NT. Philip is described as an evangelist in Acts (21:8). Earlier in Acts 8, his evangelistic activities are described. He plants a church in Samaria (Acts 8:4-24) and also explains Isaiah 53 for an Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-39). After the eunuch believed, Philip kept on preaching the gospel to town after town until he reached Caesarea (Acts 8:40). Timothy is encouraged to do the work of an evangelist (2 Tim. 4:5), since he was Paul's official representative and was an extension of Paul's church-planting ministry. If we put all the limited data together, the evangelist is someone who is especially gifted to proclaim the good news of the gospel (the 'evangel') and plant churches. Although Paul is never called an evangelist, he obviously did the work of an evangelist, and called Timothy to follow in his footsteps.

There is a related verb, typically translated 'preaching the gospel.' We could call it 'evangelizing.' To 'evangelize' (preach the evangel) in the Biblical sense is to explain the gospel and its implications, for unbelievers and believers alike, but it's used primarily in contexts where new churches are being planted. In Acts, the apostles 'preached the good news,' the persecuted believers did also. So did Phillip. Paul and his crew are also described as doing the same thing. So, the evangelist is someone especially gifted to go into new contexts with the gospel to see churches planted. Modern missionary/church-planter, who goes into another context with the goal of seeing people come to Christ and gathering a local assembly. Always has the appointment of elders in view (cf. Titus 1, completing the work he started). These folks are gifts to the church in that they are the front-lines agents, often the vessels the Lord uses in first creating his church in a new place.

Finally, the last two items on the list are what Paul calls pastors and teachers. The Greek grammar here likely indicates he views these two gifts as connected, but not the same. Our word 'pastor' is actually Latin for 'shepherd.' So Paul here literally says that the Lord has provided shepherds for the congregation. This shepherding work is what the overseer/elder does (cf. Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-2).<sup>3</sup> Shepherds lead the sheep by modeling the Christian life. They feed the

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<sup>2</sup> Given the amount of claims to prophesy in the church today, we should consider some biblical implications for those who claim to have a word from God, make a prediction, and are wrong. That puts them in the category of a *false prophet*. For context, false prophets were commanded to be killed in the Old Covenant (Deut. 18:20-22). The test: if what they said didn't come to pass. That's sobering warning for us today, with how flippantly we view prophecy. We should, at a minimum, pursue these folks, calling them to repent of their presumption, and enacting church discipline if they are unwilling to acknowledge their sin.

<sup>3</sup> For OT predictions that God would restore the leadership of his people by giving them faithful shepherds, see Jer. 3:15; 23:4. Paul sees this, arguably, as being fulfilled by Christ (the Chief Shepherd) who gives faithful shepherds to his people.

sheep by teaching and instructing with the apostles doctrine. They protect the sheep from false teachers and others who would do them spiritual harm. This is the shepherding work Paul envisions here. Closely related are the teachers. These are mature people without all the shepherding responsibility who are gifted to impart truth to others. They are extremely useful to the church to impart sound doctrine as well as help to flesh out practical implications in the lives of the believer. Again, they are closely related to the broader shepherding (or pastoral) work mentioned earlier.

Paul's purpose here is not necessarily to set out a hierarchy of offices in the church. For instance, he says nothing about deacons in this list, and evangelists/teachers are nowhere described as an 'office,' per say. So why does he highlight these particular giftings? Because they are all centered on the truth, with speaking the truth to the congregation in various ways. God uses his truth in our lives to awaken faith in conversion. He also uses truth to dispel lies, to energize our faith, to cause us to grow in Christ. So Paul is highlighting God's provision for the church, particularly in those who share the truth with others.

### **The Purpose of Leadership (4:12)**

<sup>11</sup> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...

According to this verse, the purpose of pastor Bryan's role, and the other pastors/teachers of TBC is to make sure, to the best of our ability, that you are equipped, prepared. That's why God has gifted them to this church.

**What is equipping?** The noun form of this word is used only here in the NT. But the verbal form is used many other places. It can refer to mending nets (Matt. 4:21) restoring people back to spiritual health (Gal. 6:1), or more generically to any kind of preparation, such as the preparation of a disciple to become like his master (Luke 6:40). You can think both restoration, and preparation. The term in Paul's mind probably covers both. Pastoral equipping, then, is restoration from sin to usefulness, and preparation toward usefulness.<sup>4</sup>

**How does it happen?** What does it look like? First, equipping happens with shepherds *teach the truth*. The fundamental way we are equipped is by progressively coming to know the truth from faithful teaching. That's because our core problem is that we're prone to deception, even as believers. We still struggle with the corrupt old nature. In 4:22, Paul says our old nature is corrupted "according to the desires of deceit." This means that our old nature is fundamentally a deceived nature. Because it's deceived, it desires all manner of corruption. We think sin is actually good for us, so we pursue it. We think that living for self rather than living in obedience to God will bring ultimate satisfaction. Now that we are saved, we have a new nature, and a new capacity to understand and apply the truth. But it's progressive. We have to be

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<sup>4</sup> As a side note, outside of the NT, this 'equipping' word was used in the Greco-Roman world for setting a bone, which I thought was interesting, especially given our illustration this morning.

faithfully taught so that our minds are renewed, so that our discernment builds, so that we can spot the lies and run toward the truth. Leaders help us in this, as they teach the truth and counsel us in it very specifically. This is the baseline way equipping happens.

But teaching isn't the only way shepherds equip the congregation. We also learn by watching it modeled. So equipping happens by *modeling the truth*. We get to know our shepherds and teachers and disciplers, we watch how they live, how they react to situations, how they repent and forgive, how they endure suffering, and what really motivates them in life. And we imitate. That's huge in equipping.

Leaders also, as they are shepherding folks at close range, get to know them, and are in a position to really draw out and affirm the gifts they see in operation. So leaders equip by *affirming gifting*. Have you ever had a pastor or someone who is discipling you pull you aside and say, "Hey, I saw you the other day doing X, and wow, the Lord is really producing fruit here in you, sister. Keep at it." That's encouraging, isn't it? That's a form of equipping. It helps us dial in on areas of giftedness and work at them.

Leaders also help equip in that they help *facilitate needs* with those gifted to meet those needs. It's not always necessary for a leader to facilitate this because we often see needs all around us without a leader facilitating. But it can be very helpful and useful, as an example, when a leader pairs a young lady with an older lady for discipleship because he knows them both, but neither of them know one another. Leaders help make needs known that other believers can seek to meet. As they exercise their gift in the opportunity, their gift is strengthened and they are further equipped. So, those are some broad categories for how we seek to equip you.

**How can you pursue equipping?** What opportunities lie before you already? Corporate services, like this one, are the obvious opportunities. Week in and week out expositions from Pastor Ferrell are incredibly equipping over the long-haul. Daniel has been incredible. We could say the same for Philippians, and Ecclesiastes, and Mark before that (and I'm just getting going!). That's our bread-and-butter equipping, the "air assault" if you will.

We seek to equip you on Sunday nights, too. In the spring and fall, we even offer classes called *Equipping Classes*! We take particular issues or portions of Scripture in those classes to equip you specifically. From practical issues like marriage and parenting, to theological or exegetical issues, our aim is to utilize the teaching gifts in the body for your edification.

Sunday school – But it's hard to overstate the importance of getting involved in a Sunday school class. That's our main shepherding arm, where each class has a pastor or teacher over it. They give attention to you in those classes. They are your closest range shepherd, the shepherd you can intertwine your life with and receive the most ongoing care and equipping.

Discipleship and Counseling – You can also pursue equipping in discipleship and counseling. It's most natural as it arises out of your Sunday school class, but we have a

counseling ministry here at the church where leaders are set aside to intensively shepherd and equip you, out of sin and to usefulness. If you're trapped in sin, please come in and talk to us. We want to help you, and direct you to Christ, who intends to free you and use you if you belong to him. You can make an appointment in the counseling center online today. Those are some practical ways you yourself can pursue this equipping.

**What are we equipped for?** Paul says leaders are given to equip the saints for something specific: for the work of ministry. We equip you so that you are useful and able to do meaningful, rewarding, glorious work: the work of ministry. That's our primary job description of pastors. Our job is to get you on the mend, so to speak, so that you can be an effective servant in the body.

When folks come to us in counseling, we try to help them see sometime at the beginning that we're not just there to help them fix their sin pattern, but beyond that, to make them useful for Christ's sake, a fully equipped member of our congregation that's part of the solution, and effective servant of the church.

I love how Paul fleshes this out later in the letter. Let me just take one example of this. In 4:28, Paul equips the thief *not just to not steal anymore*. He wants this person to learn to work hard so that he would have something to share. People would often be tempted to steal because they were poor. So Paul wanted the once-thief to become a hard worker and exercise his gift of giving, thus becoming a force for good, an equipped member, a member ready for ministry.

**What is exactly is 'the work of ministry'?** Paul gives us some clues right here in the text. Notice he calls it work: the *work* of ministry. Now, if you're familiar with Ephesians, you know that Paul's all about meaningful work that glorifies God. He told us back in chapter two that God saved us for good works, which he prepared beforehand for us to walk in (2:10). In saying we're equipped for the work of ministry, Paul is saying we're equipped to pursue these good works, the works in particular that serve (or minister to) others.

But there's another clue, too, here in this text, as to what Paul means by 'the work of ministry.' It's the phrase that he follows it with: "for the edification of the body." Both phrases give clarity to each other. In other words, the work of ministry is anything that edifies the body, anything that builds it up.

And Paul gives examples in the last chapters of Ephesians. He says we learn to speak truthfully with each other (4:25), to reconcile (4:26-27), to work hard so we can be generous and meet needs (4:28), to speak words full of grace to build up the body (4:29), to be kind and forgive (4:32), to imitate God in sacrificially loving others (5:1-2), and the list goes on. The work of ministry even spills over into how we serve our families, according to Paul, because our families, too, are part of the church. So, the work of ministry is any good work that edifies the body.

Now, we've looked at how Christ has given leaders, and how those leaders have a specific purpose to equip. But Paul doesn't stop here. He ends this passage by laying out a number of more ultimate goals these leaders are to have. So we'll call the last heading:

### **The Goal of Leadership (4:13-15)**

<sup>13</sup> 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, <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ...

Now, there are actually several parallel goals in this passage. If you want a simple summary, you could say the end goal for each one of us is full maturity. Let's look briefly at how Paul describes them.

**Unity (4:13a)** – A unified church is the mark of a healthy church. And Paul says we are to be unified in the faith. That's doctrinal unity. So the pastors and teachers are equipping us to be doctrinally unified. Also, he says we're to be unified in the knowledge of Christ. We're all supposed to really know the Lord Jesus, really trust him, really walk with him. The pastors are supposed to tune us to Jesus. [Tuning fork illustration]

**Maturity (4:13b)** – Our unity should be such that we all, corporately, think and act as one mature person, one mature adult. This is new humanity language that we've seen so often here. But what's fascinating about this is the emphasis is on corporate maturity. Have you ever thought about that? God looks at our church at TBC and gauges its total maturity, not just your individual maturity. And his goal for us is that we all grow up *together* in body life with each other. The leaders are given to help us get here. They provide the truth that will nourish us to get us to this maturity, and they should model (imperfectly) what this maturity looks like.

**Christlikeness (4:13c)** – All these goals swell up into an incredible statement that Paul makes at the end of v. 13 (think of a tidal wave that is growing through v. 13 to crash down at the end): that we would look fully like Christ in this world (read 13c). Resembling Jesus. Thinking and acting like him. Laying our lives down for each other in love, sacrificially serving each other, etc. But Paul's still not done with the goals. He tags a few more on here toward the end, in vv. 14-15.

**Progression from Toddlerhood (4:14)** – Paul essentially calls us toddlers when we're first starting out. And toddlers are constantly at risk. That means we're at *risk* when we are immature. Prone to deception by lies. Lies from false teachers, lies from our immature fleshly hearts, etc. etc. We desperately need truth, and we need it consistently. We need an example of what it looks like to live life rooted in the truth, etc. We need to learn to believe and practice

the truth—this is the only safeguard from danger. That’s exactly where Paul goes next. We progress not just from toddlerhood, but also...

**Progression Toward Growth (4:15)** – How does this growth happen? As we are truthful and loving toward one another (v. 15a). As every single one of you become more rooted in the truth from Scripture, as the pastors and teachers equip you, you will become more truth-saturated. Your life will progressively transform. And then you will be truthful, or speak truth, out of your own transformation to encourage and build up others. Paul says here we’ll be motivated by deep love for our brothers and sisters in Christ (speak truth *in love*). And this is the *means* by which the body grows. And that’s exactly what Paul hammers home at the very end of this passage. When all this equipping and ministry is happening, guess what results?

### 3. The Body Grows the Body as We Exercise Our Gifts (4:16).

...Christ, <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

#### Conclusion

Our Lord does all things well, doesn’t he? He’s gifted us, and he’s even supplied us with leaders to equip us to use our gifts. And, as we trust him and we work according to his method, he surges our body with spiritual energy and fruitfulness. We can trust that, over time, we’ll experience the kind of growth our Lord desires.