

“What Position Do You Play?”

Ephesians 4:11-16

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This is God's word.

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

I was preparing for my first mission trip to the Dominican Republic. I had committed to the trip in 2007 and signed up as soon as the dates were announced in 2008. We were finished with the planning meetings; I had my passport ready and received the appropriate shots from my doctor. Despite all of that, there was still one thing I wasn't sure of. What was going to be my part to play on this trip? How could I be a part of this team?

The morning after we arrived, we rode the bus to San Miguel, a small town where our plans were to build a water treatment facility. Our first course of action was to knock down the old cinder block building standing on the site. The decision was made by our leaders to start by knocking down a 6-foot chimney type structure standing atop one of the 8-foot walls. Bruce Jones handed me a sledgehammer and said, "Let's get started Scott." I climbed up on the wall and looked down at the ground which was strewn with broken cinder blocks, concrete, and pieces of rebar. I had to balance on the wall and try to swing the hammer at just the right strength. If I swung hard and the structure didn't give, I could easily fall backward as the hammer bounced back. If the chimney gave too easily, I would find myself going too far and falling forward. After a few tentative swings, I was able to find the correct force to use and five minutes later the chimney was gone, and I was back on solid ground. At that moment I felt like I was now a part of the team.

How about you? Have you had times in your life where you didn't know how, or where, you would participate? Maybe it was a new job, or a new school. Trying out for the band, or a team? Just about everything we do has defined roles. Even in relationships. A marriage is a

partnership and there are many duties which need to be completed. And while sharing is important, there are usually chores one or the other does more often. Michelle tends to do more of the house cleaning, while I handle most of the shopping and cooking. I do more of the yardwork, and Michelle focuses on the gardening and the bird feeders.

As members of the church, we each also have positions and responsibilities. We have often spoken here at Woodside about the different spiritual gifts God gives us. These are usually shown through the desires and talents each of us have. There are multiple passages which mention spiritual gifts. One is in Romans, chapter 12

We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your^[a] faith; ⁷ if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸ if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead,^[b] do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

There are various ways to determine your gifts. You can take a “spiritual gift assessment” in which the way you answer certain questions identifies what gifts have been given to you. I’m sure Linda Marr would be happy to help you process the assessment. Be prepared though. You might get answers you don’t expect. When I first took an assessment years ago, three of the strongest for me were administration, evangelism, and music. Administration made sense. I was the Controller at a small company at the time and was used to doing financial and administrative work. Evangelism was a surprise. At that time, I was not as far along my walk as I am now, and this gift scared me a little. But it was music which made me laugh. There are times when we are in the middle of worship and I struggle to clap and sing together – especially if the beat is one clap, then two, then one, and so on. I shared my laugh with Doug several years later. He looked at me, smiled, and reminded me of how many different musical groups I’ve brought into the church over the years.

Another way to determine your spiritual gifts is to volunteer. Just try different things. Sure, you can sign up for the activities you like. Enjoy cooking, then join the dinner ministry. Do you want to help people struggling? Sign up for Cast Your Cares, The Trenton Area Soup Kitchen, or one of the Recovery Ministries. Are you a handyman? Perhaps Habitat for Humanity looks good to you. But you can sign up for anything. You don’t need a teaching degree for Sunday School. The tech team leaders can instruct you on how you can help with sound and video during worship. And anybody can open a door, flash a smile, and welcome guests. There are so many opportunities here every week. And of course we’ll have all kinds of opportunities in November with the Church has left the building.

However, this week we are focusing on a different passage regarding gifts, and it can be found in Ephesians.

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

These involve specific gifts, given to individuals in order to lead the church. We often refer to this using the acronym, APEST - Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Shepherds (Pastors) and Teachers.

Apostles – One who is sent. It is also referred to as somebody who starts new things. There are people who organize new mission projects, or ministry opportunities, so the Church can serve more people. There is nothing wrong with joining a current, active ministry. But is there something you have a passion for? Something you'd like to explore and see how you can bring it to Woodside? That is what Apostles do. Bring an idea to Doug, or another staff member. Be prepared though. The standard Woodside response to a Christ centered idea, is not, "Thanks for the idea. We'll get to work on that." Rather, the answer is often, "That's a great idea. How can Woodside help you with that?"

Prophets – Someone who speaks for somebody. In the bible Prophets are people chosen by God, to speak for God. When we usually talk about prophets, we think of people who make predictions, and this is true – in many cases, but not all. In fact, one of the primary functions of the prophets is to tell the people how they are not doing God's will. If you think there have not been any prophets since the time of the bible, then I would ask you to consider Martin Luther King, Jr. He spent a lot of time telling the truth to people. And he did it with love. From his, "I Have a Dream" speech, he said:

"I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed. We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal. I have a dream that one day out in the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slaveowners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood."

When Jesus was asked about the greatest commandment he replied, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment." Matthew 22:37-38. But he wasn't finished there.

And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." Matthew 22:39-40

Prophets are still present in the world. King proved it by reminding us of how we weren't doing God's will. Unfortunately, many of us still aren't.

Evangelists – Ok. Do me a favor. Look at this Word. Now, think for a second. Ok, let's see a show of hands. When I said evangelists, how many of you thought of this guy? Ok, good. Now how many of you pictured him instead?

We hear the word evangelist, and we often think of the guy standing on a street corner with the "The end is near" sign. Actually, the true definition is the opposite - Evangelists share the Gospel, or the Good News. And the Good news is, God loves us.

And simply put, that is what Billy Graham talked about. God loves you. He loves me. He loves us all. If you can share your story of faith with a friend, you're evangelizing. If you can tell someone who is struggling, that God loves them – you're evangelizing.

We can, we should, all be evangelizing. You don't need to be the guy on the street corner with a sign. And you don't need to be speaking to thousands of people. You just need to share the gift you have been given: with others.

Shepherds (Pastors) – This might be pretty obvious, just from the name, Shepherd. Sheep need to be fed, tended to, protected and guided. The Pastor does this. But he isn't alone in this mission.

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: ² Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; ³ not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. 1 Peter 5:1-4

The deacons of the church help serve in this role as well. And so do growth group leaders.

Teacher – Somebody whose business is to instruct others. We normally think in terms of Sunday school teachers when we consider this. But a teacher could also be a mentor, a growth group leader, or a leader of a ministry or mission. Anybody who is instructing you in God's Law and helping you in your spiritual growth.

There are many people who believe it is the church staff who fill these roles. Certain individuals like Pastor Doug, the church staff, and the Elders and Deacons. And it is true. These Woodside members have been blessed with one, or more, of these gifts. But so have you. And you. And you too. And not just the adults. I'd like to invite Marcus & Paul to come up on stage now to share a little bit about their recent Bahamas Mission Trip.

BAHAMAS TESTIMONY

It is amazing to see how these young men & women accepted God's guidance to take this trip, found some gifts from the Holy Spirit to use to serve, and then were able to step up here today and share their experience with us.

If we are to truly be the body of Christ, we need all five of these parts working. And we need all of the gifts of the Holy Spirit working as well. We all have a part to play. Many of us have both a primary, and a secondary, gift. Preparing this sermon has helped me understand Michelle and I are probably both Apostles. With God's blessings (and a little shoving), Woodside's support, and the help from many of you, we've launched the Recovery Worship Service, the Patio Service & BBQ, the Recovery Café, and most recently the Nursing Home Worship Service. My secondary is probably evangelist, since I have felt called to share the word, whether here at Woodside, at Recovery events, in prison, and even on street corners of the Dominican Republic.

But it doesn't stop there. Yes, we are called to use the gifts we are given to serve. And we can also use those gifts to raise others up in ministry. The more we learn, the more we share. And part of the sharing can include being a mentor, teaching somebody younger in faith to grow.

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

Sometimes the circumstances in our lives cause a shift in our service. Perhaps the things we did previously don't press on us as hard as they used to. I've realized recently my time in the prison ministry has been coming to a conclusion. I don't see that as a failure of mine. I've recognized other things God has guided me to. Sometimes other things change.

Kim Englesman was a long-time centerpiece at Woodside. Classic choir worship leader, growth group leader, and hostess. But I got to know her best through our Dominican Republic mission trips. Kim was always doing whatever she could whether it was digging trenches, mixing cement, or hauling cinder blocks. But then came 2012, the year when Kim had some health issues. Her doctor told her she couldn't do strenuous activities. Kim was devastated. The DR was one of the high points of her Woodside year. So Kim went anyway. In the first couple of days of that trip, she connected with the women who do the really hard work – the kitchen ladies. She peeled, she grated, she cut. She boiled, baked, and I'm sure there was frying involved. And she chatted, talked, and laughed. As always, she found a way to bond that week with the Dominican workers, the children, and the rest of the mission team. But she really connected with the women.

From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. Ephesians 4:16

Kim wasn't able to play on the team that year in the same position she was used to. But she listened to God, accepted his guidance, and was every bit a member of our DR 2012 team. Kim is now with the Lord, and I'm sure she has found her place on the team there.

How about you? Where are your strengths? What do you enjoy doing? Think this out, and then ask God – What position on the team do you need me to play?

Please pray with me.