

Improving Your Serve

Ephesians 4:7-16

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Around 35 people who are new to Edgewood attended our Next Steps classes this past weekend. After summarizing our history and heartbeat, we emphasized our commitment to gathering, growing, giving, and going with the gospel. We don't want our members just sitting in seats, but committed to serve Christ and His kingdom. Someone asked this question, "*Are there a lot of people serving at Edgewood?*" I opened it up to a couple of our leaders and they said, "*Yes there are a lot who are serving, but there needs to be more!*"

Last week, we were in Ephesians 4:1-6 and focused on five essential qualities which lead to unity within community.

- Humility.
- Gentleness.
- Patience.
- Forbearance.
- Love.

We ended with a challenge to tether ourselves to seven truths: we are part of one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

As we come to Ephesians 4:7-16, we move from saving grace to serving grace, from a community of unity to a celebration of diversity within our community because unity is not the same as uniformity.

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

⁸ Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."⁹ (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth?¹⁰ He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)

¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness

of Christ,¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Our big idea for last week was, *we all win when we walk as one.* Here's the main point of our passage today: *No one can do everything, but everyone can do something.*

There's a place for you in this place because there's a role for every one who has been redeemed.

The Reality of Discovering Spiritual Gifts (7-11)

Before we jump in, it's helpful to define what a spiritual gift is. Here's what I wrote down: *"A spiritual gift is a special divine empowerment bestowed on each believer by the Holy Spirit to accomplish a given ministry in order to reach the lost or build up believers."*

1. Christ gives gifts to every believer. Let's begin with verse 7: ***"But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift."*** The word ***"but"*** serves as a contrast to the first six verses as Paul goes from talking about oneness to how Christ uses each individual Christian in diverse ways. The phrase ***"grace was given"*** shows that we can't earn spiritual gifts because they are given graciously to us. A gift says nothing about the one who receives it, but it does reveal a lot about the character of the giver.

Notice these gifts are given to ***"to each one of us."*** That means no Christian has been forgotten or overlooked. This is reinforced in 1 Corinthians 12:7: ***"To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."*** Around 20 different spiritual gifts are spelled out in five different Scripture passages (Ephesians 4:11; 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28-30; Romans 12:6-8; and 1 Peter 4:11).

These gifts are given according to the ***"measure,"*** or ***"pleasure"*** of Christ Himself. He apportions and assigns gifts according to His plans and purposes. Our gifts vary from each other because God's grace is manifested differently in each of our lives.

In verse 8, Paul anchors the distribution of these gifts to Psalm 68:19, which references the mighty Messiah as a victorious warrior who has returned home with gifts to distribute: ***“Therefore it says, ‘When He ascended on high he led a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men.’”*** Since Jesus has defeated death, depravity, and the devil, and is now ascended on high, He shares the spoils of victory with His own.

We see this image in Colossians 2:15: ***“He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.”*** 2 Corinthians 2:14 tells us we join in this victory parade where gifts are given out: ***“But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession...”***

In Ephesians 4:9-10, Paul breaks out into worship as He considers how Jesus descended from the glory of Heaven to the gutter of the earth and then back to His position high above all the heavens after His resurrection and glorious ascension: ***“ (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.) ”*** This messianic psalm was fulfilled by Jesus as clearly seen in John 3:13: ***“No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.”***

2. Christ gives gifted people to each body of believers. The focus shifts from how God gives gifts to every believer to how God calls certain believers who are given as gifts to the church according to verse 11: ***“And He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers.”*** The emphasis again is on the Giver of these gifts: ***“And He gave...”*** This is emphatic and literally reads, ***“And He Himself gave...”*** or ***“It was He who gave...”***

- **Apostles.** An apostle was a *“sent one.”* According to Acts 1:15-22, apostles were eyewitnesses of the resurrection, and were chosen by Christ to be the foundation of the church. We saw this in Ephesians 2:20: ***“Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.”*** As such, there are no apostles today because their function was temporary.

I want to give a caution about a growing belief in some churches called “The New Apostolic Movement” which gives certain individuals the same authority that Paul, Peter, and James had as apostles in the first century. This movement also believes in “new” revelations from God.

- **Prophets.** The Holy Spirit also gave some to be prophets, who were spokesmen for God. Just as there are no apostles today, I don't believe there are prophets either because the canon of Scripture has been completed. 1 Corinthians 13:8 says, *"As for prophecies, they will pass away."*

If apostles and prophets were foundational for the early church to get established and have since been phased out, evangelists, pastors, and teachers are functional and vital for today.

- **Evangelists.** These individuals are "bearers of Good News," presenting the gospel in compelling ways so people get saved. Philip is an example of an evangelist according to Acts 21:8: *"...and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist."*
- **Shepherds.** The word "*pastor*" literally means, "*shepherd*," and gives us the picture of an individual caring for, and leading God's flock. Jeremiah 3:15 says, *"And I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding."* I often reflect on 1 Peter 5:2: *"Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly."*

Pastors are to tenderly tend and teach, to lead and feed God's flock, and to guide and guard as they protect the sheep from predators. One pastor summarized his responsibility like this: *"My job is to comfort the afflicted, and to afflict the comfortable."*

I met a pastor this week who pastored in a town of 800 about 45 minutes from the QCA. He mentioned that his church is small and is primarily made up of senior saints. He told me he recently preached about how easy it is to grow older without growing up in our faith. After the service, an 87-year-old woman made her way over to him and said, *"That's been me. I haven't been growing. It's time for me to grow up in my faith so I'm going to start reading the Bible every day."* My pastor friend had tears in his eyes as he was telling this story. When I told him he was a good pastor, he smiled and said, *"I love them. They're my family. I'm just trying to teach them they still have purpose."* I told him I love my church family as well.

- **Teachers.** A teacher is gifted to expound on God’s Word by explaining and interpreting what it means and how to apply it to our world today. James 3:1 tells us teachers ***“will be judged with greater strictness.”***

Have you ever been asked how many ministers we have at Edgewood? You might respond by saying we have six: Ed, Dan, Kyle, Chad, Chris, and me (we’re also praying God Himself will provide our next Administrative Pastor and Children’s Director). Actually, when we say we have six ministers, that is not a biblically correct answer. The right answer is that we have over 900 ministers and six equippers.

One of the rallying cries of the Reformation was that every member of the Body of Christ is a minister or a priest. 1 Peter 2:9 paints a beautiful picture of how God views every Christian: ***“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”***

It would help to lose the “laity” and “clergy” labels. When the church was launched in the Book of Acts, every believer saw themselves as ministers. It was D.L. Moody who said, *“It’s better to put ten men to work than to do the work of ten men.”*

Have you ever wondered what pastors do? Often people make fun of me and say that I only work one day a week. I correct them and say I work just a half day a week. Actually, it’s a pretty nice gig. You pay your pastors to get *you* to do all the work!

No one can do everything, but everyone can do something.

The Reasons for the Distribution of Spiritual Gifts (12)

There are two reasons spiritual gifts have been given according to verse 12: ***“To equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”***

1. To equip. The word ***“equip”*** has the idea of *“making fully ready.”* This is the same word used to describe what James and John were doing when they were ***“mending”*** their nets in Matthew 4:21, which involved cleaning all the seaweed off them, stitching up the sections which were torn, untangling them and getting them ready to be used again at a moment’s notice. The nets were prepared for

service, not to be put in storage. In classical Greek, the word was also used of the setting of a bone in order to put it back into proper alignment in the body.

Pastors are equippers who prepare and repair what's broken so we can all be strengthened **“for the work of ministry.”** The preposition translated **“for”** is emphatic and means, **“into.”** It indicates this is our ultimate purpose. Those who are equipped go *into* ministry. 1 Peter 4:10 says: **“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.”**

Incidentally, the word **“work”** reminds us we are called to labor for the Lord. If you’ve been working hard and wonder if it’s worth it, allow 1 Corinthians 15:58 to encourage you: **“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”**

2. To edify. When pastors equip people to do the work of the ministry, this allows **“for building up the body of Christ.”** The word **“for”** refers to the purpose behind serving – so that the body is built up. Years earlier, before departing from the Ephesian church, Paul gave them this charge in Acts 20:32: **“And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up...”**

This week I came across a post entitled, “10 Benefits of Being a Church Volunteer.” Here’s an excerpt...

During the summer of 1986, I was working in a grocery store while attending college. This job came with the unbelievable benefit of one unpaid week of vacation per year. So when July came I had a decision to make. Should I go to the beach for sun, fun and relaxation or should I make the strategic decision to teach 2nd graders in Vacation Bible School? I did not realize it at the time but this one single decision put me on a path I would continue on to this very day...I have been serving as a volunteer at my local church for over 29 years.

The only change I would make to this article is in the title. Instead of seeing ourselves as “volunteers,” we must see ourselves as “servants.” A volunteer serves when convenient; a servant serves out of commitment. The volunteer does what she wants to do when she feels like doing it. The servant serves no matter what.

We see this attitude on display in Luke 17:10: ***“So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’”*** I have heard it said you can assess how well you are doing at being a servant by how you respond when you are treated like one. Ouch. Jesus didn’t recruit volunteers; He redeemed us to be servants. So, here’s a question: In what ways are you serving, fellow servant?

No one can do everything, but everyone can do something.

The Results of Deploying our Spiritual Gifts (13-16)

Spiritual gifts are not toys to play with. They are tools to build with. When pastors do what they must do, and people do what they are called to do, according to verses 13-16, we will experience growth in at least seven ways.

1. Unity. Once again, we see how important unity is because it’s mentioned first in verse 13: ***“Until we all attain to the unity of the faith...”*** Simply put, when we all serve together, God knits our souls together. The word ***“attain”*** refers to travelers arriving at their destination. Disunity often raises its ugly head when people sit on the sidelines and talk about their unmet needs instead of sacrificially serving in order to meet the needs of others.

2. Maturity. When we deploy our gifts we also move towards maturity as we see in the next part of verse 13: ***“...and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood...”*** It’s time for us to grow up and stop being spiritual infants as we read in 1 Corinthians 3:1: ***“But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ.”***

3. Conformity. The last part of verse 13 shows how serving Christ helps to conform us to Christ: ***“...to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”*** In a study called *Follow Me*, the number one factor in moving people deeper in their relationship with Jesus was to unleash them to serve in some ministry.

4. Stability. Verse 14 calls us to be spiritually stable and doctrinally solid in a time when there is so much compromise and confusion in our culture and in the Christian world: ***“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.”***

The word for “**children**” was used for “*unlearned infants.*” Being “**tossed to and fro**” means, “*to be whirled around by waves.*” The word “**wind**” speaks of strong and yet invisible forces that blow the unstable in every direction. Doctrinal dismantling and deconstructing is often done by “**human cunning**” and “**craftiness**,” which makes me think of the serpent in Genesis 3:1: “**Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast...**”

It behooves us to be on the alert and to check our sources so we are not led astray. Even resources that were fine years ago may have shifted doctrinally without us even being aware. This happened to me last weekend when I recommended *The Bible Project’s* animated overviews of the Books of the Bible. Thanks to some discerning members who lovingly shared some concerns, I did a deep dive into the beliefs and was troubled to find at least seven points of significant doctrinal disagreement. We have since removed the link to this resource from our website.

5. Clarity. Verse 15 calls us to doctrinal purity and precision: “**Rather, speaking the truth in love...**” The word “**rather**” means that in opposition to being tossed to and fro in our faith, we are to practice “*truthing in love.*” Some of us speak truth without love and some of us love without any truth. Truth without love can become brutality and love without truth can lead to sentimental spirituality.

As I was thinking about the importance of being clear and convictional while we “**speak the truth in love,**” I posted some thoughts on Facebook this week. Here’s part of what I shared.

If you don’t get your idea of who Jesus is from the Bible, you may end up believing in a false Jesus. One author explains how many people today follow a fabricated Jesus commonly depicted in one of two ways.

- *The “feel-good Jesus.” This false Jesus is always smiling, always agrees with you, never disapproves, and is grateful when you come to church every now and then. This Jesus tells you that everyone is going to Heaven because everyone is basically good at heart.*
- *The “feel-bad Jesus.” This Jesus is always serious and stern, pointing out your failures at every turn. He’s harsh and tells you to keep working harder to get to Heaven.*

The real Jesus is a good Shepherd and wise King who responds to

human sin with truth and grace. The true Jesus didn't come to make us feel good or feel bad. He came to seek and save lost sinners like me, and like you (see Luke 19:1-10).

The fake "feel-good Jesus" isn't honest with you about your sins and the false "feel-bad Jesus" isn't forgiving when you do sin.

*The real Jesus speaks the truth in love. Jesus didn't condemn the woman caught in adultery, but He also told her to live differently: **"Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more"** (John 8:11). Jesus gave grace to a sinner so she could be healed, and He told her truth by calling her to holy living.*

In short, we must be convictional about sin while being compassionate toward sinners. The real Jesus is not "politically correct," but He is always perfectly correct. We must settle whether we will follow what Scripture says or what society says. Let's not compromise by caving to culture, but let's not clobber sinners either.

We must aim to be like the real Jesus who was "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

Speaking of being convictional about sin while being compassionate toward sinners, I'm thrilled to announce Dr. Christopher Yuan will be leading a "Holy Sexuality" conference here at Edgewood this fall. He will also be preaching in all three services that weekend!

6. Vitality. In order for a body to be healthy, the various parts need to work together as we see in verse 15 and the beginning of verse 16: ***"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, when each part is working properly..."***

It's only as we are ***"held together by every joint...when each part is working properly"*** that we will grow. When we're out of joint with others and we choose not to work together, our church will suffer and eventually stagnate.

Sometimes, we get stuck in our growth because of some struggles in our lives. That's why I'm so thankful for our EdgeCare Ministries which meet on Sunday

afternoons. Even if these groups don't benefit to you right now, you may know someone you could invite.

- Griefshare meets every Sunday from 2:00-4:00 p.m. in the Life Center.
- DivorceCare meets every Sunday from 2:00-4:00 p.m. in the Family Room.
- Alzheimer's and Memory Support meets from 2:00-4:00 p.m. on the last Sunday of the month in the Conference Room.

7. Charity. Once again, we see the necessity of love as stated in verse 16: ***"...makes the body grow, so that it builds itself up in love."*** Love is the lifeblood of any church. If we don't love one another, we'll lash out at each other like we see in Galatians 5:15: ***"But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another."***

Someone wrote: *"God gave me a gift, not for me but for you; and God gave you a gift, not for you but for me. If you don't use your gift, you're depriving me; if I don't use my gift, I'm robbing you."*

Do you know what the best spiritual gifts are? That's kind of a tough question, isn't it? Actually, the answer may surprise you. The best spiritual gifts are the ones you already have! But it's more than just having gifts; you must discover and deploy them.

One reason Edgewood is a strong church is because so many of you are using your spiritual gifts – and it will be even stronger when even more of us put our gifts into action. A church that does not value gift-based ministry will not grow to maturity. Imagine what would happen here at EBC, and in churches around the world, if every believer would realize they are meant to be contributors, not consumers.

This week, I asked everyone on staff to answer a simple question: *"What percentage of the people at Edgewood are serving?"* According to the "Pareto Principle," it's common in many churches to have 80% of the ministry done by 20% of the people. The good news is the Edgewood staff members believe over 300 people are involved in serving in some form or fashion, even more if you count Fall Festival of Fun, VBS, and Easter. Perhaps we're at 35-40%, but our goal is to have 100% involvement. I appreciated what Liesl Parks, our Nursery Coordinator, had to say: *"I think we have extraordinary servants at Edgewood. We also have extraordinary needs, which is why it feels like we're still short on help sometimes."*

I would love to see our church culture change where we go from asking people, “*Are you serving?*” to “*In what ways are you serving?*” It shouldn’t be a question of whether you’re serving; it’s *where* you’re serving, whether that’s here, or partnering with one of our Go Team partners in the community.

We may not have it all together, but together we have it all.

We can make a kingdom impact when each of us commit to be *on* mission and to be *in* ministry. Our goal isn’t to have a bunch of people get saved and then have them sit in church. We want to equip saints so they become servants who are sent on mission to reach their neighbors and the unreached nations for the glory of God.

A man approached a minister and told him he wanted to join the church, but he didn’t think he had a lot of time to devote to serving: “*I have a very busy schedule and can’t be called upon to do any cleaning or teaching or serving in any way. I can’t help with special projects or with the students because all my evenings are tied up.*” The minister thought for a moment and then said, “*I believe you’re at the wrong church. The church you’re looking for is downtown.*” After getting directions to the church, the man drove away and soon came to an abandoned and boarded-up church building. The pastor had made his point.

If you have not yet been saved by God’s grace, it’s time for you to receive the free gift of the gospel.

Invitation

We’re going to demonstrate our “common-unity” by celebrating communion right now. Listen to Luke 22:19-20 – “***And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”***²⁰ ***And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”***”

Did you catch the language of substitutionary sacrifice? “***This is my body, which is given FOR YOU...This cup that is poured out FOR YOU is the new covenant in my blood.***”

The Savior died in your place, as your substitute. That means He died for you... instead of you...in your place in order to purchase you for His own purposes!

The bread and the cup remind us that the Lamb of God sacrificed Himself as payment for sinners, fully satisfying God's justice. He poured out His life so our sins can be pardoned. He descended and died for all and ascended above all to give us gifts in order to make us one.

Before we receive communion it's important to reflect and take a spiritual inventory. 1 Corinthians 11:28 says, *"Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup."*

- **Consider your relationship with God.**
- **Confess any sins that God brings to mind.**
- **Commit afresh to serving according to your giftedness.**

We practice open communion. You don't need to be a member of Edgewood to participate, but you do need to be born again.

Distribution of Elements

New Members